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Where Jasmines Bloom
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PART I

CHAPTER I

THE 19th — cavalry of Sherpore were giving a dance, and as all the world north of Delhi knows, when that regiment does a thing, it does it well.

The miss-sahibs of the cantonment had chattered of it for weeks past, till the sahibs wearied. The matrons themselves had lent an indulgent ear. Each bungalow had its complement of guests who overflowed into the compounds in little tents which made the station look like a camp. The hotel was full to overcrowding. Traps and gharries drove up and down the Mall filled with new-comers who wished to see the beauties of Sherpore, and contrast them unfavourably with those of their own station.

People from the district had come in in numbers. Lonely jungly-wallahs from outlying places, who had forgotten the very way in which to turn a compliment, mem-sahibs from dull stations with expectant daughters, young married women who strove to detach admirers from the train of others of their kind with determination, all streamed in, all of pleasurable excitement.

The reading-room at the Club had been in the hands of the Colonel's wife and her accomplices since the morning. They had tempered the lights with rose-red shades, which made the years fall like leaves from the faces of the elder ladies, giving even a pinkish glow to the yellow complexion of Mrs. Yates of the Police, and softening the already too highly coloured cheeks of Mrs. Jacobs. They hung curtains over the most remote "kala-juggas"—making them the despair of chaperons—they enclosed the verandah, and cut it up into little nooks for two with guileless simplicity, they

had tents pitched in the compound into which even moonlight would hesitate to intrude. They had wrangled together over the programme of music, the menu for supper, been in absolute accord about the abundance of "Simkin,"¹ got their husbands dressed in time with commendable punctuality, had, in fact, behaved in a manner which marked them forever as mem-sahibs indeed.

In a corner of the ballroom a middle-aged woman sat talking to an elderly man. She was dressed in some non-descript way which could never impress itself upon the mind. Her hair was plentiful and just streaked here and there with grey, and was arranged in the fashion of the year before last. Her bright brown eyes looked about her with interest. Her plump face and the soft lines of her mouth seemed to express a comprehensive good humour. One would pick out the sweetest looking girls in the room, instinctively, as her daughters, if one were asked. It would seem the natural sequel to the story of her face.

"A dance in a Frontier Station is a lovely sight," she said suddenly.

The man beside her turned towards her. The rather sad expression of his face was tempered by extreme kindness. His deeply-set blue eyes looked out on the world with a sort of tolerance. A steady expectation, in spite of numerous disappointments, of finding his fellow-creatures good, shone in them.

"It is," he agreed. "And our contingent of miss-sahibs would not disgrace a beauty-show. Look at the little Larcombe girl! She is like spring itself in that green dress and little wreath."

"That is the point which strikes you," Mrs. Turner's eyes twinkled merrily. "I was thinking of the uniforms and brightness—and light. You are more personal—you fix it on to individuals."

Colonel Jansen laughed.

¹ Champagne.

"That's it, Mrs. Turner. I always spot a pretty face, but I'm bound to say a plain one pleases me as much. Character seems to me the most interesting story ever written."

"Very often one with a sad ending."

"That may be. But you're right. It is a sight—a beautiful one."

The dancing crowd swept by them to the strains of the native band. Sappers, tall cavalrymen, policemen, civilians in their dark coats faced with pale blue, men of Frontier regiments, all made up the kaleidoscope of colour, and dancing with them, women grave and gay, pretty and plain, happy-eyed, or with the hint of tragedy in their faces. Suddenly the band stopped and the room emptied itself.

"Bob and I are having a girl out from England to stop with us," began Mrs. Turner. "It was his idea—and I let him carry it out. There is some suggestion of her finding work in this country after a long visit to us."

"Does your husband think you are lonely?"

"No, it isn't that. I really believe it's because he can't bear the idea of pretty Amy Temple's daughter being unhappy. They were old friends, you know. I think he was surprised at the way I jumped at it. His suggestions don't always meet with such a kind reception."

"Then you are glad?"

"Somehow to-night makes me want to enjoy myself *through* someone else," answered Mrs. Turner a little wistfully. "I want a young thing with life before her who will flirt and laugh and tell me all about it afterwards when we are brushing our back hair together. You men can never understand the longing that gives us to impart information."

"Indeed I can—I enter into it fully."

"I wonder if there's any phase of feeling you'd have no sympathy with, Colonel Jansen," said Mrs. Turner. "Or anyone you'd ever admit was wholly bad. The person in whom you'd see no virtue must indeed be past all aid."

"Oh, I don't go as far as that. You were saying——?"

"I take no interest in flirtation myself, except a sort of vicarious one," went on Mrs. Turner briskly.

"You wish to sit behind those screens by proxy, listen to all that is being whispered in those little tents upon the lawns, hear the nonsense that is going on all around us?"

"That's it. I think no woman who has come to my age, with a married life like mine behind her, can feel differently. Even as a girl I wanted friends—not flirts. I either liked people—or I didn't. I saw no point in pretending."

"But to-night?" asked Colonel Jansen gently.

"To-night," she echoed faintly. "To-night, I wish Guy had been a daughter. I want it more every year—I felt it was a mistake at the time. I want a girl to come up to me between the dances and whisper all sorts of silliness into my ear, who will ask my advice, and never, never take it, and scramble in and out of scrapes, and wear unbecoming colours because she will have it they suit her, and finally marry a man who is far too good for her, and never look at anyone else with interest for the rest of her life."

"I see," said Colonel Jansen quietly. "In fact, have an ideal married life."

"Exactly."

"You don't ask much for your protégée! Well, I hope the little girl who is coming next week will be able to do all these things. I shall watch for her at dances, and wonder greatly at the stories she is pouring into your ears. Perhaps when you are in a chatty mood you may confide some of it to me."

"Later—*much* later," went on Mrs. Turner, "I shall hand her over to some ineligible, after Bob and I have done our best to marry her to one of your officers. We shall relent at the last moment, as my mother relented when I insisted on marrying him. She sighed once when she saw the retreat of the civilian, and realised all he was taking away with him—but never again. She was a wise woman."

"And her daughter?"

"Sees at last that in marrying no one's opinion weighs but one's own. I don't believe the majority of girls are the foolish creatures they are made out to be. Underneath it all there lies an instinct with which you men would do well to reckon. The problem of why a certain couple are attracted to each other is the vainest that ever perplexed anyone."

"Because the answer lies in something beyond our ken?"

"I believe so."

"Well, these girls develop into self-reliant women, who push their husbands along—that much I do know. Now, I fear, I must look out for my next victim, as I see them tuning up. Shall I leave you here?"

"I am dancing the next with my husband, so in all probability, that does mean being left here," said Mrs. Turner lightly.

The band struck up again, the first bars of the latest waltz. A couple came into the ballroom, then another, then the whole glad throng. A tall Frontier Force man in uniform began to dance with a girl in blue, a stout Colonel, with a perfect breastful of medals, started to move round his partner with audible respirations. They collided sharply with another pair of heavy-weights, decided that they could not remain in the same room with the young people of the present day, and hastened to a distant verandah, there to play at Flirtation, the oldest game of all. The little Larcombe girl, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, floated round with a young civilian, quite certain that her first dance was beyond anything she had ever imagined.

Mrs. Turner sat on by herself, well amused. She liked to count how many times everyone danced with each other, how long they were absent in remote verandahs, not so much from a wish to gossip, but more because she liked, as it were, to keep her finger on the pulse of romance. She watched May Larcombe especially, with a strange stirring of the heart, a sort of expectant interest in one just starting on the pathway of life. To-night the girl's obvious youth and

gaiety made a strong appeal to her. She knew that to Colonel Jansen she had voiced the thoughts that had been simmering in her mind for months, that a longing to have a young thing about her had become almost an obsession. Her maternal instinct was not satisfied by the weekly letter to Guy, she wanted an object on which to vent her affection and solicitude. Yes—she was very well pleased that pretty Amy Temple's daughter had aroused Bob's sympathy.

A middle-aged man, rather bald, in the police uniform, came towards her.

"You here, Jenny? I've been looking for you everywhere. Well, d'ye mind being left here? Unless you'd like me to kick you round the room for a bit? What is it they're playing? A waltz? Should have thought it was too jiggy for that, but I suppose you know. The fact is I've met a fellow I was with at Mardan, and we were having a crack."

"Run away and finish it, dear. I'd rather watch. I've been dancing with young Arlington and feel rather battered. I couldn't stand a turn with you till I've quite recovered."

"Quite sure?" asked Mr. Turner with obvious relief. "We ought to have booked up some more together—we always seem to fit in with what we want to do. It's a funny thing, Jenny, I always enjoy my dances with you. Well, I'll be back very soon. Here's Emily Taylor coming to talk to you, so I'll be off."

Mrs. Turner watched her husband's broad shoulders disappear in the crowd with an indulgent smile. She had always said that it was a certain child-like quality in him that had first attracted her towards him. A sort of simplicity about him aroused all her motherly instinct.

"Why, Jane, you're actually watching your husband's back. One would think you were just engaged," said a rather sharp-featured woman in a bright pink dress. A large aigrette, placed at a dashing angle, ornamented her head, and gave alarming lurches as she walked.

"I was thinking he was very like what he was the

day he proposed to me—a child all through,” said Mrs. Turner with a smile. “He believes now that we have fallen in with each other’s wishes, and are mutually pleased. The only falling in has been done by me.”

“Really? You shouldn’t give way. You’re too easy-going,” said Mrs. Taylor. “Let us sit here and watch the dancers. There is Colonel Strange disappearing into the bar again. What a trial it must be to his wife, to be sure . . . but we must not be hard upon him. They say her temper is *vile*. Gossiping again? No, no, I never do. May Larcombe looks nice, but the dress is dirzie-made, and is her colour green?”

“Colonel Jansen and I were saying that she looks like spring.”

“Like spring?” echoed Mrs. Taylor vaguely. “How so? I don’t quite follow. . . . Oh, I see what you mean—young and all that sort of thing. A very pretty idea I’m sure. I wonder which one of you thought of it.” Suddenly her voice changed. “How d’ye think it looks?” she asked sharply.

“What, dear?”

“My dress. Nathia Ram made it under my eye on the back verandah, but I’m bound to say I think no one would guess it. Honestly speaking, it suggests London. ‘Paris again’ Mrs. Jacobs said as she passed me. I think it was very prettily put. As you see, even the shoes match. Look at the pink rosettes on them, and notice the note of colour repeated in my hair.”

She twisted her head to allow Jane a better view of a bright jam-tart which formed the base from which the aigrette started.

As she was speaking, a tall, dark young woman of great slenderness, dressed in grey, with rather fantastic ornaments, came and sat down opposite to them. Her large eyes looked absent and vague, she hardly appeared to listen to her partner but glanced about the room quickly and anxiously.

“How d’ye think she looks?” asked Mrs. Taylor.

"Oh, as usual. Weird, out of the common, startling. It's a pity she cultivates that restless look—it gives her such a strained appearance, and to-night she looks as if she were watching."

"Surely she's become very thin," said Mrs. Taylor, peering short-sightedly at Mrs. Jansen. "I never remember her eyes looking so large."

"Of course, you know the reason?"

"No, I don't."

Mrs. Turner was not above the very human weakness of loving to impart information. She also liked to prolong the enjoyment.

"My dear, you must know. Everyone does—it is station gossip."

"I assure you I do not."

"Well, there can be no harm in telling you. She is supposed to be in love with some young man. She is wearing herself out for him, can think of nothing else."

"You don't say so," said Mrs. Taylor with intense interest. "How very remarkable. Now you tell me, I see how worried and worn she looks. But who is he?"

"That I did not hear."

"I believe you do know, only have got a fit of prudence," said Mrs. Taylor with heavy playfulness. "Well, what a woman who is married to a man like Colonel Jansen can want with running about after other men is more than I can see. Dear me, can this be number fifteen striking up? I am engaged for it to Major Harbin. There he is looking for me. So hard for the men, I always say, to have to find us. I declare I shall help him by going to that side of the room. I hope you have a partner? I was full up ten minutes after I arrived. So strange, I always say, what the men see in me. There! now he is coming. I just waved to him like that, you see. Oh! so you are engaged? Now don't forget that you are going to tell me the rest of that story when the other sex allow us a little time to ourselves."

CHAPTER II

THE Turners' bungalow was of a pale pink complexion, supported on many pillars, which gave it a porticoed effect, and was of large and imposing appearance.

It stood not very far from the circular road which enclosed the station, and lay in a turning off the Mall. A fringe of shisham trees shaded the lawn, Mr. Turner's eternal pride, and tempered the light on the bungalow walls. The deep verandah which ran round the house kept the rooms cool and dark, and was lined with a row of flower-pots which the mallie tended fitfully. At the foot of the garden the canal slipped by on its way to irrigate the fields of the district. A little shrine stood near the road which led to the City, where all through the long hours of the day the women came out to pray in crazy ekkas or great closed gharries, till it was time to drive back in the cool of the evening.

Through a gap in the trees, a glimpse of the hills which surrounded Sherpore could be seen, dim blue-grey shapes with misty outlines, which could look dark and threatening as the clouds hovered over them, or faint and mysterious as the heat haze dimmed their edges. A dark cleft showed where a pass wound down, through which the caravans journeyed, bound for the caravanserai in the City, where the packs were unloaded and the goods bartered.

For the last two years this had been Mrs. Turner's home, and the air of comfort and well-being that she had imparted to it she had been at some pains to achieve. She did not try to give her drawing-room an essentially English air—which is the ambition of so many mem-sahibs—nor did she fill it with every description of country-made ware. It seemed

to strike the happy medium, to be full of objects of interest which, without reminding one too forcibly that one was in India, made no determined effort to conceal it. Jane Turner had always, since the first years of her married life, been an energetic and careful housekeeper, an authority on khansamahs, khitmutghars, and—somewhat rare in her kind—quite fluent in the language. It was her boast that Bob had the value of every pice of his pay—except what he squandered himself at the Club—that nothing of what passed into her hands was wasted.

Her life had hitherto run in the ordinary lines of an Indian miss-sahib who is promoted in due time to mem-sahibdom. As a girl she had joined her parents in an up-country station, fallen mildly in love with the handsomest civilian, fallen out again on meeting a handsomer, danced, ridden and flirted with the zest of twenty-two years. In her third cold weather she had met Bob Turner, and she had forgotten all previous fancies in the happiness of their comradeship. After a friendship which lasted the season, she had gone up to a Hill Station with her mother and sisters. She had wondered at the flatness of it all, the weariness that had settled down upon her, the limitless boredom of dances and tennis tournaments. The only event for her which had any interest was the arrival of the dāk, and even that filled her with a sick sense of disappointment. After a month, during which Jane perceptibly lost flesh and colour, one day a tonga drove up in front of the hotel, out of which Bob Turner appeared, much begrimed with dust and tanned by the sun. The flatness and weariness instantly disappeared; life seemed once more filled with interest and delight.

The next day he proposed. And the next. . . . No, Jane always stuck to it that it was *not* the next day that she accepted him. That would not have done at all. She held over her answer until he looked harassed and worried, and lost interest in his meals. When he reached that point, she realised masculine endurance to be at an end. She con-

fessed afterwards that it was only for the look of the thing—she knew what her answer was going to be from the first.

They had been married in Murree, and she had returned to the station as a young woman of ordinary looks, sunny temperament, and a zest for life, the wife of a junior policeman. After a year her boy had been born—but he was rather a sickly child, and had to be sent home when very young to his grandmother in England, and Jane found herself face to face with a terrible blank in her life, which even Bob was powerless to fill. She fretted for the child, until she realised that she was dimming the happiness of her husband. Then she set to work to occupy her empty hours with a systematic determination. But she had no interest in embroidering pink roses on green backgrounds, nor drawing little pictures of terrible correctness, nor even in pursuing a mild flirtation. She only wanted Bob—and Guy. She could not pretend otherwise. Then one day she started to write a story. It widened and deepened. It seemed almost a pity not to make it into a book. It ran in simple, easy lines, and told of brave men and fair girls who became united in the last chapter, who did the usual things, but always in the pleasing way that made one sorry to part from them, and wish mildly to hear something more of them in a possible sequel.

After fifteen years of married life, Jane reached the age of forty without ever having had a serious disagreement with her husband. True, they had thought differently on some subjects, as for instance, when she had thought it well to send Guy to a good school, instead of a second-class one, as his father suggested. But Mr. Turner was an easy-going man, much given to letting things slide. Jane had not let the idea of the school slide—but she ceased to discuss it. She made the necessary economies in the bungalow, and curtailed her time in the Hills for several hot weathers, and always spoke of it as her husband's original idea. He thought it was a good one, and commended himself for a far-seeing parent.

"Funny you don't see the advantage of education, Jenny," he would say from time to time. "Wish my poor old dad had done the same by me. But there! you're a woman. I'm not blaming you, my dear—don't think I'm blaming you——"

On looking back at her life, Jane realised that parting with Guy had been a wrench, and the return of her first book had been painful. When the boy had developed a weak chest, and her MSS. a marked homing tendency, she had suffered in varying degrees. Then, after a time, he developed tone and strength, she had found a publisher, and her placid life went on without even these vexations.

At first she had felt the inevitable separation from her husband for the hot weather, but after a time she realised that even this had its compensations. When they were reunited in the autumn, their comradeship had not suffered, but had become cemented. Bob even had relapses to his lover-like attitude of their early married life. She had always been his best friend, the one to whom he instinctively turned, not only in moments of vexation—the inalienable privilege of wives—but when he had done a good round of golf, when he was left a small legacy, when he was promoted.

In looking over her married life, Jane realised that their affection had steadily ripened. She felt herself to be a happy woman, contented, satisfied. It already seemed strange to her that, with very mediocre good looks, she had attained to such happiness, when she looked round her, and saw far prettier women than herself who might reasonably expect to keep their husbands as lovers, dragging through ill-assorted unions, days of boredom and complaint, enduring intolerable weariness. There was pretty Mrs. Larcombe, who was miserable and told everyone about it, and poor May Wilson who told no one but whose story could be read in her sad eyes, while she, Jane Turner . . . No, she could not understand it.

As she sat in her drawing-room, the afternoon after the

dance, these thoughts began to stir in her mind. She knew that there was not one woman in the station with whom she would have changed places. Certainly not with Emily Taylor, whose life appeared emotionless and flat, far less with Mrs. Jansen, who never looked as if she knew how to extract any solid happiness from it.

How strange, almost tragic, she had looked last night, in her grey dress and fantastic ornaments. Yet Colonel Jansen was one of those quiet, equable men by whose side it must be a privilege to walk through life. An atmosphere of dissatisfaction and unrest seemed to emanate from her. When with the other ladies of the station—although they made heroic efforts to draw her into their circle—she seemed an alien, remote from their friendly chatter. Although she was undeniably pretty and fascinating, with the inevitable train of admiring subalterns, she seemed to strike an incongruous note. "Yes, that was it," Jane reflected, "incongruous." She stood out from the others in a sort of weird distinction, impossible to classify or describe, not of them or with them, but a personality apart and alone.

As she was thinking of her, the bearer drew aside the chick from the door, and came into the room with a card upon the salver. It was Mrs. Jansen's.

CHAPTER III

SHE came into the room and up to her hostess with a sort of eagerness. She was dressed in white, and it made the long lines of her figure appear slenderer than usual. Beneath the brim of her hat her large dark eyes appeared bright and excited.

"You are not resting after last night?" she asked. "I felt I must come—I could not keep quiet."

"Oh dear, no—I never rest after a dance. I am too seasoned for that. I did not hear your trap drive up."

"No, I walked over. I want to hear how you thought it went off—if anything could have been improved upon. Let's have a good gossip. 'I will go over to Mrs. Turner's,' I said to myself after tiffin, 'and hear what she says about it.'"

"That was very nice of you," said Jane warmly. "Well, it was delightful. No drifting away to the bar or card rooms, and even Miss Larkin danced everything."

"You really think so?"

"It went with tremendous swing. I remarked it at the time. Mrs. Taylor said the same."

"Did she? That's good," said Mrs. Jansen flatly.

"We both agreed that it was the best dance of the year. We had not enjoyed ourselves so much for a long time."

"I *am* pleased."

In spite of her wish to gossip, Mrs. Jansen appeared to have very little to say. Jane could not help feeling that she was disappointed about something. She sat very quiet and still; a sort of listlessness seemed to have come over her.

The brightness had died out of her eyes, leaving them with that rather sad look in them which lately had become their habitual expressions.

"You look tired," said Jane kindly.

"No—I'm not tired," said Mrs. Jansen vaguely. "At least not really so. We didn't get back till it was getting light this morning, but I'm used to that sort of thing. So much depends on that, doesn't it?"

For the first time she struck Jane as rather an aimless woman. She looked round the room searchingly. Her eyes seemed to move from one object to another ceaselessly. Then she got up, and went to the window overlooking the compound.

"Your husband has been having a siesta. I see his pipe and the inevitable peg on the verandah."

"Oh no, he is at the lines, and never gets back till much later. That must be Captain Oakes' property."

"He is still with you?" She came back and sat down, facing Jane.

"Yes, he is not quite fit yet. The fever recurs from time to time. He will stay on till he is well enough to rejoin his regiment."

"He has been really ill? It is true, then?"

"True? Of course it is. I only wish it were not so. He has had a sharp attack."

"People talk so," said Mrs. Jansen dreamily, "I wondered . . . that's all."

A silence fell between them. Outside an ekka rattled noisily by on its way to the City, a bugle-call sounded in the distance. Far away a band was practising—a few phrases over and over again, with wearying monotony—then it stopped suddenly, and all was still.

"You know we are expecting a girl to stay with us," Jane began, after a pause. "It was Bob's idea. She is the daughter of an old friend, and quite adrift in the world. I hear from people at home that she is very pretty. Last

night I could not help wishing that I had some young thing with me——”

But Mrs. Jansen was paying no attention. Her large, dark eyes seemed very vague. She began to look about her again as though she were watching—always watching. She gave the impression of some one who awaits a crisis.

“Why has she come?” thought Jane to herself. “I thought it might be to hear about Daisy—but she isn’t even listening. It can’t be to find out if I’m tired after last night—that would be too foolish. What a mysterious woman she is! I can’t make her out at all.”

“Did you notice the pretty Munro girl last night?” she began. “I think it is a case with young MacMahon—they spent the evening dancing together, or sitting out in those little tents in the garden. I shan’t allow Daisy to make herself so conspicuous when she comes. I feel I have it in me to be a relentless chaperon.”

“Daisy?”

“The girl we are expecting. I was telling you about her just now. Poor child, it is a plunge for her, coming to a fresh continent and new people.”

“Do you and Mr. Turner always look after the weak and desolate?” asked Mrs. Jansen with a faint smile.

“Oh no—it just happens,” said Jane placidly. “It happens very often—but not too often for us. That’s Bob’s way—he likes it.”

As she was speaking, the chick was pulled aside from the door, and Harry Oakes came into the room. He was a tall, dark young man of thirty-two, with a heavily-built frame, deeply-set eyes, with a rather sombre expression in them, and straight, well-moulded features. He walked with a slight stoop, but with a sort of grace, lightly and softly, rather like some large animal which pads its way about. His attack of fever had given his face a dull pallor, which made his eyes look darker and more sunken than ever.

As he came in, Jane was speaking to Mrs. Jansen. She

stopped, and glanced at Harry, then back again to her guest. Then she turned suddenly to the window, and pretended to be interested in a cart which was passing along the circular road. She did it—as some women will—because they shrink from watching a thing they feel they were never meant to see, because they turn instinctively from the sight of suffering. That one glance at Mrs. Jansen had told her, more than an hour's observation.

She knew now why she had come. She saw the reason in the strained, eager look in the eyes, in the pathetic, rather thin lines of the lips, in the small, white, harassed face. The cause of it all was Harry, with his rather remote personality, his taciturnity, his curious, attractive individuality.

Jane experienced a slight shock. It was the sensation we have all felt a dozen times, when we have been suddenly confronted by something primitive and vital. It is as if a veil had suddenly been torn away, and for a moment we see the thing as it is, without the trappings of conventionality about it.

Being a kindly-natured woman, whose sharpness was purely on the surface, Jane was conscious of no feeling of criticism, only an intense pity. She longed to hide Mrs. Jansen from curious eyes, to protect her from the babble of the station. She recognised at once, with an absolute conviction, that this was no silly fancy. It was a vital, palpitating thing. Something in Harry had stirred this woman, arousing in her a force which may have been sleeping for years—which might have slept on all her life—if they had not met. So this was the young man of whom the station gossiped; and she had not known it! While imparting the story to Emily Taylor she had been ignorant of its most thrilling detail. Then she had not seen them together—now she knew beyond the shadow of a doubt.

“You weren't at our dance last night,” said Mrs. Jansen.

She spoke hurriedly, sharply. "You weren't ill? Did you never mean to go?"

Harry sat down in a chair near the window.

"When the moment came I was too slack—thoroughly lazy in fact," he said carelessly.

"He is much too young for such an excuse, isn't he?" said Jane. "I hate to hear young people aping old age just as much as older people aping youth."

"Much too young," Mrs. Jansen echoed vaguely.

"I have him on my hands all day. Never take a young man into your house to nurse. It is a disillusioning experience. You are expected to entertain him, amuse him, in fact, make his life worth living. It is too much."

"There is always the hotel, Mrs. Turner," said Captain Oakes.

"You will find yourself there some day, if you don't improve."

"Don't you go out at all?" asked Mrs. Jansen.

"Oh yes, I wander round to the Club when I feel inclined. I sometimes even rouse myself to take a peg."

"Well, you can drive me there some evening, when you are not taking Mrs. Turner."

"I shall be delighted."

"My husband was only asking me to-day when you were going to dine with us. I said that you had quite given us up. But he will be hurt if you put it off much longer. I hardly dare to face him without fixing a day."

Jane saw that Sybil Jansen had reached the point—that desperate, unhappy point—at which some women arrive so quickly, others in lingering, hardly-fought stages, at which they do not care who sees. She did not take the trouble to conceal from the eyes of another woman the extent of her feeling for Harry. She must know that she would read aright the story of her haggard face, her restless eyes, and sharp tones, but she made no effort to disguise it. As Jane saw them playing the one-sided game that has lasted the ages,

which Old Time must be tired of watching, she said to herself that the tragedy lay in the fact that Harry was entirely unconscious of it. He realised as much of Mrs. Jansen's feeling for him as the mallie watering the flower-pots in the garden, or the myna in his tree. It passed him by without even impressing itself upon his consciousness. He saw only a pretty, excitable woman who appeared willing to take him up, to allow him to drive her about the station, dance attendance on her perpetually. That much he did see, but not the passion which drove her on, tossing her here and there like a toy, nor the force he had awakened, the extraordinary attraction he had for her. With the blindness of a man, he did not connect all this nervous excitement with himself.

When she had gone, and Harry had returned from seeing her to the gate, he came back into the drawing-room where Jane still sat.

"Pretty woman," he remarked casually.

His indifference somehow incensed Mrs. Turner, why she did not know. If she had been asked at that moment why she minded his careless comment on a woman she did not much like, she could have given no answer. She did not realise that she had unconsciously ranged herself on the side of womankind, the emotional sex that is so buffeted by fortune, wounded by man, made to suffer through his blindness. That Harry did not even see! It lay in that—most surely it lay in that.

"Do you think so?" she asked sharply.

"Oh well, yes. Don't you?" he went on lightly, a little surprised at her tone. He wondered if he had been quite wise in praising one woman to another, but decided that Mrs. Turner was the sort to whom one can talk freely. "Too thin, of course, and a born fidgeter. Very much of that would give one nerves oneself. But I imagine her husband is very easy-going."

"He's the nicest man—bar one—I've ever known," said Jane gravely. "One of those quiet, *dependable* people you

meet sometimes. You recognise them after the first five minutes, and everyone else is always telling them things."

"I wonder quite what brought them together. Rather ill-assorted, I call them. But when one begins speculating quite why and how people are in love . . ."

"Harry, are you intelligent?" asked Mrs. Turner suddenly.

"Moderately so, I believe. My mother has remarked upon it once or twice."

Captain Oakes gave one of his rare laughs. For the moment he looked almost boyish, his dark, expressionless face lit up, his eyes shone.

"Well, if you are, what must a stupid man be like, I wonder!" exclaimed Jane fervently. "How can you? Oh! how can you? No, don't argue—I can't stand it. Sometimes I feel I'd like never to see a man again! I feel like that now."

"I am hopelessly out of my depth. I feel I've made a dreadful mistake—but quite what I don't know. Please don't scold me, Mrs. Turner—I am not strong enough for that yet. When my temperature has been normal for a week I'll listen."

"Normal? You're abnormally stupid—that's what you are," said Jane crossly. "But I suppose you can't help it. We must leave it at that."

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Mrs. Turner met Daisy Temple at Sherpore Station, and saw a dust-coated figure alight from a carriage, her first feeling was one of disappointment. She mentally registered a vow never again to trust to the verdict of friends in deciding a girl's looks. It was obviously unreliable.

She saw a slender girl of rather insipid colouring, pale and untidy, with straggling wisps of hair, wearing an unbecoming topee—though at this time of day it was not necessary to wear one at all—and a holland coat of indifferent cut. She appeared bewildered by the crowd of coolies, uncertain what to do, without initiative or decision.

Miss Temple saw a middle-aged, squarely-built woman who obviously had no *flair* for dress, with a flushed face, speaking to the coolies in a way she hardly liked, and pushing her way through the crowd on the station with a sort of aggressive determination.

Months afterwards they discussed these first impressions and laughed over them together. It seemed too good a joke that they had not liked each other at once, that there had been a moment when they saw one another as others saw them, before affection dimmed their eyes. They did not realise that this was the one instant that they really looked at each other dispassionately, with that calm criticism which dies directly love enters in.

On the drive to the bungalow in the gharry, Miss Temple spoke very little. She seemed limp and exhausted, took no interest in the compounds that they passed, hardly turned her head to look at the polo-ground or barracks, that Jane pointed out with a sort of proprietary pride.

As she caught sight of the hills at the end of the road, she gave a cry of delight, then leant back in the carriage and relapsed into silence. She looked a fragile little creature, huddled in the corner, rather homesick, very tired, trying to conceal great nervousness under a stiff manner.

"There's rather a glare everywhere, isn't there?" she asked presently, as the gharry turned into the Mall.

"That, my dear, is India," said Jane decisively. "You must get used to it—and dust. You will never get away from either. But you must have seen that on your way up."

"Are most of the bungalows pink?"

"Either that or yellow. It seems that the man who ran them up liked colour. I don't dislike it—it's less startling than white. Do you notice those gates? That is where the General lives, and on the left, are the police lines. Ah! here we are. This is your home for the next few months. I hope you will take to it. Bob is in his office, so I shall make you run away to your room and have a bath. I don't believe anyone who hasn't travelled in India can quite understand the luxury that is. Now I shall leave you in peace, and send my ayah in to you."

When Mrs. Turner had gone, Daisy stood looking round her lofty, barn-like room, with a rather bewildered expression. The large almirah, or cupboard, the bare white-washed walls, the tiny bed, the expanse of floor, seemed to her dreary and comfortless. The windows were high up and covered with wire-netting to keep out the birds, the door which was protected by a chick, stood open, and looked into the garden; a small bath-room opened off the bedroom. It was quite a walk to the dressing-table, an expedition to the fireplace. She went to the door, and looked into the compound. It seemed cool and green to her tired eyes, and in it, quite close, someone was singing, a queer crooning little song. A waterwheel creaked noisily, some crows crept up to the verandah and away again with wild caws of alarm,

a myna called to its mate in a distant tree. Far away, from some parade ground, came the call of a bugle, faint but unmistakable.

Daisy realised at last that she was in India.

When she had removed the top layer of dust, and put on a dainty frock held in at the waist by a broad pink band, she returned to the drawing-room. As she came in, Jane was struck, as by the first sight of someone. She wondered for the moment if this could be the girl she had met an hour ago. Daisy Temple was neither colourless nor insipid—she was, in fact, a very pretty girl.

Her fair hair waved off her face, and fell into little tendrils, her grey eyes were almond-shaped and very clear, under faint, delicately-marked eyebrows. She had a slow smile of great sweetness, a tiny dimple in one of her cheeks, a girlish figure of remarkable slenderness.

“What a dear little girl,” thought Jane as she watched her coming across the room. “What a very dear little girl. And how childish and pathetically young she looks. I must take very good care of her. I believe she is of the kind that never grows up.”

“I do hope you will be happy with us,” she said, as she gave Daisy some tea. “My husband and I are very fond of young people, and always have plenty of them about. My boy is at home, but I have always wanted a daughter.”

“I am sure I shall, Mrs. Turner,” Daisy answered shyly. “I feel I shall be very happy with you. It is going to be nice here.”

“I shall make you have a good rest before dinner. I cannot allow you to get quite tired out your first evening with us. Bob would be very angry. He says I have no pity for people weaker than myself,” went on Jane, in the gentle, motherly tone which suited her so well. “And you must get back your colour before I introduce you to the station, and do me credit. I have a reputation for having pretty girls to stay with me.”

Daisy smiled timidly.

"I'd like to get to know you and Mr. Turner well first."

"About that, my dear child, there will be no difficulty whatever. You'll get to know Bob the first moment he speaks to you. He's like that—without reserve, I tell him." Her eyes twinkled merrily. "No depth. Everything on the surface, utterly shallow. It's as well to tell him these things—it adjusts the balance."

Daisy laughed lightly.

"What a clever woman you must be."

"Oh dear, no—only sensible. Sensible Jane Turner—that's me. I have no subtleties. If you asked every woman in the station what they thought of me, they'd say the same. They're never jealous of me—who could be?"

"That must be very nice."

"It's no compliment from your own sex—very much the reverse. I forgot to tell you that we have a Captain Oakes staying with us. He's just had fever, and as this bungalow has a reputation for being cool we had him here. I'm afraid you won't like him much. He doesn't care for girls, in fact, he provokes me very much by his indifference."

"Why do you mind?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose it is that it appears to me foolish not to conceal when you are bored. Of course, the real cure is never to *be* bored. But Harry hasn't got to that point yet—he's too young. You mustn't mind if he ignores you—it's just his way."

"I will remember."

"We have been friends ever since his regiment came to Sherpore—I have, that is to say. I don't think Bob really cares very much about him. He likes all men to be cut after one pattern—his own. Anything at all subtle or out of the common, baffles and annoys him. So I am allowed to enjoy Harry's society by myself, and have him here when

he is ill. I liked him from the first. He always seemed different to other people, and that attracts me as much as it upsets Bob.

"You will be making friends of your own, too, before long," went on Jane. "I will get Mrs. Taylor to take you to the Club, till I am able to go about with you myself. Then you must learn to ride—Bob will love to teach you. He has a pony that I use sometimes, which will just suit you—he hardly ever goes out of a walk."

"That is a very encouraging description of him."

"Then there are several dances coming on. I don't think you will find Sherpore dull. There are some nice girls, too, for you to make friends with, when you are tired of us."

"I don't think that will be very soon."

"I am afraid you will find us a very ordinary couple. We are just like dozens of others whom you could meet in any cantonment, or home on leave, grumbling at the weather. You will see our duplicates everywhere!"

"That would be impossible," said Daisy simply. "I've never met anyone I've liked half so well before."

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CHAPTER V

MRS. TAYLOR'S Sunday tea-parties were famous for a certain heaviness of atmosphere. The people she selected to meet each other generally cherished latent hostilities, were stricken with the dumbness which hostesses do well to fear, and resisted all efforts to manœuvre them to the side of more congenial acquaintances. Whenever any two of them showed a tendency to chat together with a show of friendliness, by an unhappy knack she never failed to separate them; and left a hopelessly ill-assorted pair together undisturbed.

In spite of this, Jane, accompanied by Daisy and Captain Oakes, went there the following Sunday. Mrs. Taylor had offered to chaperon the girl, and as Mrs. Turner was anxious that she should take her part in the gaieties of the station, she determined that the meeting should take place soon.

Directly she entered the room she realised that the plan was not to be a success. Mrs. Jansen sat in a corner silent and aloof, darting quick glances about her, and emanating an atmosphere of restlessness. Two other ladies chattered volubly. A middle-aged colonel—still a bachelor, and so the victim of Mrs. Taylor's romantic plans—talked to his hostess at the other side of the room. A young subaltern, of notorious shyness, affected an intense interest in a book of photos.

When they were all seated, Jane found herself near one of the older ladies. Mrs. Jansen was by Harry, and Daisy and the subaltern began to talk together.

"We must soon be thinking of hot-weather plans," said Mrs. Taylor. "Last night I shed a blanket—I did

indeed. I hate to admit it, but one must be honest. Whenever that happens I begin to wonder where I shall be the least bored for the hot weather."

"The orchards round the City are just beginning to bud," said one of the other mem-sahibs. "It is like the cloud, the size of a man's hand, in the west—a sign of things to come."

"And the mimosa bushes along the road to the Fort are covered with little yellow balls," added the other plaintively. "Oh, I hate to see them when I remember what they mean, heat and dust—and separation!"

"Even that has its good points," said the most senior of them quietly. "Although a great many of you never can be brought to see it. I believe the orchards and the mimosa bushes are not threatening anything so very dreadful. Perhaps another rivet put into a happy marriage."

"Ah, this is the country where you see them at their best," cried Mrs. Taylor fervently. "No one could deny it who has had any experience. You must not be deceived into thinking otherwise, Colonel Walters, by my silly chatter. Underneath all our frivolity you'll find real solid affection."

"One needs it—in India," said Mrs. Jansen intensely.

Jane looked at her attentively. One slender foot was tapping the floor restlessly. Her cheeks were softly flushed, her eyes shone, she looked about her with a sort of sharp intensity. For the moment she appeared a very pretty woman.

"My compound is going to look lovely this year," said the first mem-sahib, seizing the conversation again fiercely, "In spite of the efforts of the mallie, and John's grumblings, I expect a perfect carpet of violets. I shall enjoy it...."

"For how long?" asked the youngest one sharply.

"Why by the time it's here it will all be withered and scorched in the heat, and you flown to Murree or Simla."

"To think that one has to decide *again* which it is to be," said Mrs. Taylor fretfully. "Go over the old weary

ground, one knows so well, of hammering it all out with one's husband. Aren't you worried, Jane ? ”

“ Not in the least.”

“ Perhaps your mind is made up ? ”

“ It is.”

“ Where are you going ? ”

There followed one of those mysterious pauses, about whose coming there is no law, which slip away again before we have quite realised that they are here, leaving a babble of friendly chatter behind them, but impressing themselves upon the memory with a curious insistence.

“ We are going to Cashmere.”

“ Cashmere,” echoed Mrs. Jansen softly.

“ Cashmere ? For sport ? ” asked the shy subaltern.

“ Anyone would think that you and Mr. Turner were only just married,” said Mrs. Taylor roguishly. “ That is what we all used to do—or try to do—the first few years. A few coolies and a tent or two, and then the loneliest valley one could find. But how long does that phase last ? ”

“ Some time it appears—in certain cases,” said the Colonel dryly.

“ I am such a one for my fellow-creatures,” Mrs. Taylor went on, with a coquettish glance at him. “ I should never be happy like that now. My husband would not keep me long with him, I fear, if he suggested a camping expedition.”

“ He must not run that risk with such a treasure at stake,” he answered gallantly, goaded into reply by the expectation of her face.

Mrs. Taylor suddenly realised that she had other guests besides the Colonel.

“ When you marry,” she said, turning to Harry, “ you'll do just the same—at first. The stage lasts different lengths of time. With you I prophesy a swift return to normal things.”

Mrs. Jansen moved restlessly.

“ When you marry ? ” she echoed sharply. “ When is

that to be? Is it one of the things that's got to happen, that you look forward to, like your majority, or paying your next mess-bill, or some dull affair like that?"

Harry laughed lazily. "Who knows? I least of all."

"Curious the things that fate deals out to us," she went on, fixing her dark eyes on his and dropping her voice. "One has a gift that isn't worth the having, another a thing one would drag through centuries to attain. It's . . . it's . . . so unequal, the way we are divided into categories. . . ."

"To which do you belong?"

"Don't laugh—don't you see I'm not laughing?"

"But it is best—the only way."

"Not for me."

"Oh, for everybody," said Harry lightly. "Laugh long, and above all, last."

"I can't—I'm not that sort of woman," she cried sharply.

The three other mem-sahibs looked round on hearing the slightly pained voice, then began talking again together.

"What sort are you?"

Mrs. Jansen half closed her eyes, and drew her chair a little closer. "The sort that feels," she answered quietly. "Every bit of me—I shall always be like that. I suppose I'm receptive—sensitive—anything you like. I can't skate over things as you suggest. If I could I should be talking with Mrs. Lucas about khansamahs. But I'm not . . . I am talking to you. I can't turn aside with a shrug of the shoulders and a smile from things that get hold of me. There's something in my make-up too vivid for that."

She moved her fingers restlessly. Her slender body seemed almost too fragile a thing to hold the active spirit. As Jane glanced across at her she was struck anew by the strangeness of her. Where ought she to be, this elfish being? In the glade of some pine forest, lurking in the shadows, slipping along through the trees, among the nullahs and fissures of some mountain with fairies, wandering through orchards

decked with blossom, listening to the cries of the jungle as the moon gets up . . . ? She did not know. Certainly not here with the tale of the dhobie being related near her, and the murmur of "shop" between Colonel Walters and Mr. Taylor on the other side of the room. She seemed as incongruous a sight as a vivid blot of bougainvillea would be in some garden plot, as strange a sound as a heron's cry coming from the cage of a tame bird.

"Too vivid and alive," Mrs. Jansen repeated softly. "Too superficial and yet not superficial enough. Oh, there's something very wrong with a woman who doesn't care if the dhobie loses one thing or the whole lot, or if the cook sends in the same dinner night after night. You're vivid too," she went on suddenly, "you don't know it—but I do. I recognised it at once. You feel—or rather *could* feel—as I do, if you'd let yourself. That's why I——" she stopped, looked at him steadily, then went on again. "Why should I mind? That's why I took to you from the first. Oh, like to like is the oldest law in the world, and the most impossible to break."

Harry's mind had been running on other things, a polo pony, a trapper he was trying for Mrs. Turner, a letter he had received from home last mail. He now came back to the present with a shock of surprise. He felt very much out of his depth. He had almost a sense of repugnance for Mrs. Jansen's intense way of talking, the personal note she had introduced. Her dark glances, sudden flushes, and the little coqueties that she was employing were failing of their mark as much as darts flung at a venture. Her desperate effort to attract, to claim his attention, were defeated by their very intensity. He was becoming restive, looking round the room to see if a reshuffle were possible, glancing at Jane, hoping that she would soon make a move.

Mrs. Jansen became rather pale.

"Don't look at Mrs. Turner. She's not going to go yet. But I wonder she has allowed you to stay so long—with me."

“Why not with you?”

“Oh yes, why not?” she asked mockingly.

His discomfort increased.

Mrs. Taylor, seeing that they were talking together with a show of absorption, and not caring for a conversation to flourish in which she bore no part, now advanced towards them, but retreated on catching sight of the hostility in Mrs. Jansen's eyes. She returned to the side of the room where Daisy and the young subaltern sat, and broke in upon them successfully, quenching their young laughter with a machine-like effectiveness.

“Can't you see I'm not part of it?” Mrs. Jansen asked almost violently. “Not with it—nor of it, in any way at all! What do I mean? Oh, this drawing-room, these chattering women, this routine. Neither are you—but that is beside the mark. Perhaps some day you'll realise how I stand with my face turned towards civilisation . . . but really . . .”

“You don't care about station life?” he asked.

“Care? Do you? But I forgot—you must not be disturbed, awakened out of your sleep, your dream. We must pretend you are like . . . these others.”

Her eyes swept round the room including Colonel Walters, Mr. Taylor, and the shy subaltern in a scornful survey.

“Shall I tell you something you have always known, that is to say, if you have thought about it at all,” she went on more gently. “These ladies—don't like me. There is a surprise for you! They see in me a jarring element, a false note. They try—oh yes, some of them try very hard. But there it remains. Their best endeavours cannot include me in any sort of an intimacy. And it is my fault—of course. I am not the sort of woman to whom others gossip, consult about the new dress, the latest admirer.

“The wives of the men of my husband's regiment are specially to be commended,” she went on. “But they cannot break through—what? I don't know. There is no

ground on which we can meet, no interest we can share. You wonder what I mean—but it's intangible, vague. . . ."

"Ah . . . that's very interesting," said Harry, in the tone of a man whose attention has been wandering.

She looked at him with widening eyes. If his silence had deceived her, the utter coolness of his tone could not fail to show her his indifference. Perhaps she had believed herself to be striking a responsive spark, to be arousing an interest in this curious, aloof young man. She eyed him steadily. His air of uneasiness would have been obvious to the most casual observer. He seemed apprehensive, alarmed at what she might say next, above all anxious that her sharp tones might not be heard by the others in the room. She looked at him searchingly, almost pitilessly, with a sort of hard observation. She took in every detail of the heavy handsome face, with its moody eyes and overhanging brows. Then she rose to her feet suddenly, said good-bye to her hostess, and left the room in a sort of whirlwind even before he had quite realised that she had left his side.

As they were driving back in the gharry, Harry having gone to the Club, Daisy said suddenly:

"I think Mrs. Jansen is very fond of Captain Oates."

"My dear, what makes you say that?" asked Jane, startled indescribably.

"I saw it at once," she answered simply. "How? Oh, I have no idea. One just *knows* these things, doesn't one? That is to say, if one is the sort of person who sees anything at all. Mrs. Taylor wanted him to talk to *me*, quite forgetting that we were staying in the same house, and only on the principle of the spinster being paired off with the bachelor, but Mrs. Jansen would have none of it—she drove her off with one look."

"Emily is always faithful to that first rudiment. It is the bedrock on which hostesses plant their feet."

"I suppose some one has once admired Mrs. Jansen, when she looks animated and talks a lot in that excited

way," went on Daisy, in her gentle, thoughtful tones. "Perhaps told her it suits her. But she didn't *feel* animated, she felt sad . . . very sad indeed. I knew that all the time. Whenever I looked at her and saw her eyes sparkle and that colour on her cheeks I was conscious of it."

"And I thought you and young Harper were making such friends. And all the time you were watching us, and coming to your own conclusions. You made him talk and forget his shyness, and the alarming presence of four senior mem-sahibs."

"Oh, he's a nice boy," said Daisy jauntily. "I did listen to him—and watched at the same time."

"And Harry? Have you noticed anything about him? Does he admire Mrs. Jansen when she laughs and talks?"

"Captain Oakes doesn't see her at all," Daisy answered quietly. "If she came into the room one day with golden hair, I don't believe he'd notice any change. Why she might be a plain woman, from the way he looks at her. I should be sorry to have that perfunctory sort of attention paid to me. Why, for him, she's just—not there. One can't put it differently. And the odd part of it is that she's pretty—fascinatingly pretty in a strange, out of the way style. But what does it signify to him? Oh, why are men like that I wonder, that they don't even *see*?"

"No, they don't even see," said Jane shortly.

CHAPTER VI

DAISY TEMPLE settled down very quickly into the routine of life in the pink bungalow. When she had unpacked her things and stowed them all away in the big almirahs, got rid of the last atom of dust that clung to her, and learnt a few useful words in Hindustani, chiefly couched in the imperative mood, she could hardly believe she had not spent all her life in India. The creaking of the water-wheel in the garden, the flapping of the chicks against the doorposts, the cries of the mynas seemed sounds she had listened to for all time. The brown dust in the compound and parade ground, the golden sunshine, the sight of the distant hills between the trees, the very patter of the children's feet in the servants' quarters seemed to her home-like and familiar. She felt that she was going to love India, with all its mystery and enchantment, its beauty and squalor, its subtle fascination. After the crowded P. & O. steamer, the hot train journey in a carriage with chattering women, the calmness and silence of the Turners' bungalow filled her with a sense of repose. She liked to sit in her lofty bedroom—which at first had struck her as so dreary—and watch the flickering light in the compound, the shadows lengthening across the lawn as evening drew on, and feel that there was no hurry. She was in the East—and an Eastern lethargy crept over her.

Her life had hitherto been spent with people to whom she was essentially a poor relation. Her parents had died when she was very small, and left her with barely enough on which to live. She had always worn the clothes of richer girl cousins, stayed with them in slack times, been packed off

to another set of relations when the spare room was wanted. Her rather timid nature had been dwarfed by her circumstances. Where a stronger character would have risen above them, she became subservient to them. She had been treated with a sort of tolerant kindness hardly tinged with affection. She had made few friends, and those she did make drifted out of her life one by one. She had always kept up with the Turners because they were old friends of her mother's, but she had come to look upon them more as names than individuals. When the letter of invitation had arrived it had failed to arouse her to a great degree of enthusiasm. It appeared to her only another chapter in a story of loneliness and isolation. Her whole life had been spent in the background. She had ceased to believe any other existence to be possible.

She had not been in the pink bungalow more than a few hours before she realised that it was going to be entirely different. She was called upon to play a leading part. In the warmth of the Turners' atmosphere she expanded and developed. Happiness—that great beautifier—started its kindly work upon her. Her whole nature began to respond to the geniality of her surroundings. Her disposition, which was naturally sweet and sunny, answered like a flower turning to the sun.

“Why, child, you're a different person to the pale, washed-out creature that I met a fortnight ago,” Mrs. Turner would say. “You're certainly fatter—and I'm not sure a little taller, but that I'm not prepared to stand by.”

“And you're not the same as the woman who advanced to meet me, calling out, ‘Jao, jao,’” Daisy would answer.

“The coolies appeared to get in your way. I had a sort of feeling that somehow it was *your* station.”

“I was in a hurry to get to you. You looked too miserable to be left to yourself.”

“You also remembered that you belonged to the ruling race.”

Jane laughed good-temperedly. She had grown very fond of Daisy, even in the short time she had known her. Somehow the girl appealed strongly to her maternal feeling. She roused in her that protective love which a self-reliant nature so often feels for a weaker one. Mrs. Turner had hardly ever asked advice in her life, and had most certainly never taken it. Daisy could not drive to the Club without hearing Jane's opinion about it, she could not choose a length of muslin in the bazaar or from the box-wallah on the verandah without consulting everyone. To the older woman she appeared as one of those natures who can never stand alone. At every age, and in all circumstances, they lean upon some other more decided personality ; and in this lies their peculiar attraction.

A deep affection sprang up between the two. The sort of friendship that one so often sees between women of different ages, temperaments, and standpoints—which never knows the fluctuations where rivalry steps in—began to grow, a solid thing which both felt to have reality about it. In a few days Jane knew all about the endless changes, loneliness, and weariness of Daisy's life, with its longing for affection and independence. Mrs. Turner said little about her own concerns ; she was not one of those women who think that any detail, however trivial, must interest and amuse, who always translate the word " friend " as " listener," and then wonder at the impermanence of friendship. She never complained about the egotism of others who are only absorbed in their own affairs. But in a few days she found herself talking very openly to Daisy, exchanging confidences, speaking to her almost as if she were her own age.

Mr. Turner had, directly he observed her pretty eyes, waving hair, and the suspicion of a dimple, taken her under his especial charge, and made her entertainment his occupation. As he pointed out to his wife, the idea of having her to stay with them had started with him, and he had

stuck to his point although she had fiercely combated it. Now he hoped she recognised the wisdom of his suggestion. Perhaps next time she would be less confident of her own judgment.

"I, my dear? Combated it fiercely? When did I say a word against it?" she asked patiently.

"Well, I can't exactly name chapter and verse. But your whole tone was contradictory and hostile. It isn't so much the words as the way they're said."

"I always wanted it as much as you—perhaps more. It distressed me very much to think of pretty Amy Temple's daughter as anything less than happy. I don't as a rule air my grievances, but I have had a good many empty hours when you were away in the lines. But you have never heard of them."

"Then you ought to be very thankful to me for having filled them," he concluded with a sort of self-satisfied finality.

A week after Daisy's arrival Captain Oakes had a return of fever which kept him in his room for a few days. Mrs. Turner deputed Emily Taylor to take Daisy to the Club and introduce her. She herself did not like to leave the bungalow till Harry was about again. In a day or two he was sitting out on the verandah pale and worn, wrapped in a great-coat, and more sombre-looking than ever, watching the crows hopping on to the matting, then away to their trees with caws of alarm. He did not join in the conversation much, but put in a remark here and there, and listened while Jane and Daisy chattered. She had an idea that their quiet, happy intercourse amused him. He could talk or not, as he pleased, or sit without speaking, watching them sew, or under the shisham trees while she and Daisy played croquet on the lawn.

"We really must start entertaining you, my dear," said Jane briskly one afternoon. "When I get this invalid

off my hands I shall begin. I think he is well enough now for a little society."

"That's the worst of strong women—they have no mercy," said Mr. Turner sadly. "Daisy and I have got on very well these last few days. What d'ye want a crowd of people for?"

"That's all very well for you, but rather dreary for her. Hitherto her gaieties have consisted of one tea-party at Emily's, where she met young Harper who hardly ever speaks above a whisper, and Colonel Walters who never speaks at all."

"She's like a vacuum cleaner, collects only dust."

"What do you say to a picnic to the S—— gardens for next week? We'll ask the Chapman girl, and that nice boy in the P.W.D., and young Cameron, and a few others. I might arrange a tennis-party for a day later on. You must see the Station, and, my dear, be seen."

But Miss Temple did not appear to think so at all. She preferred present company to any the world could offer. She thought any change would be one for the worse. The tennis-party, it appeared, attracted her as little as the picnic.

"But you don't intend to remain buried in this bungalow with Bob and me—and Captain Oakes?" asked Jane aghast. "When you might be riding, and dancing, and doing all the things that girls love."

"Miss Temple is probably tired from her journey," said Harry.

"Then you don't want the picnic and the tennis-party?"

"Personally I want the picnic very much," he answered.

"But just ourselves. Let us go as we are."

Daisy's eyes lit up.

"Dear Mrs. Turner, as we are."

"Let them be happy in their own way, Jane."

"How unnatural the young people of the present day are, to be sure! When I was young the mere mention of a

picnic was enough. I was ready for anything. The word 'bored' wasn't in my vocabulary at all. You're all blasé, that's what's the matter with you."

"I am neither blasé nor bored," said Harry. "But I should be. I think you mentioned the Chapman girl . . ."

"Just us four," went on Daisy softly. "And the bearer and the tiffin-basket. I want to see India like that—and ask as many questions as I want to. Mr. Turner took me to the City last week. I loved that. We could talk or not, as we pleased. When I was with Mrs. Taylor I asked her why some of the men wear green turbans, but she said she'd never noticed they were green."

"Come, do let us picnic and tennis together if we want to," said Harry, looking almost animated.

"Well, have it your own way. I see I must give up to you all since you're so determined. Now perhaps you will allow me to go to the Club? I am thankful to say I am not yet tired of my fellow-creatures, as you appear to be. I really believe that Bob and I are younger than you two! No picnics or tennis-parties—I can't understand it at all."

When she was seated in the trap and driving to the Club Jane's demeanour altered. She smiled quietly once or twice to herself, put up her sun-umbrella with a click that betokened satisfaction, and even laughed softly as her husband spoke.

"They're an unnatural young couple, eh, Jenny?"

"You think so? Well, I shouldn't have put it like that. Unnatural you call it? Well, well, that's one way of looking at it. Don't understand what I'm talking about? Never mind. Finish telling me what Captain Armstrong said when he was shown the pony. You never told me the end of that story."

CHAPTER VII

ONE evening when Emily Taylor had borne Daisy off to the Club—under the impression that she was conferring great happiness—and Harry had gone for a ride in sulky and morose silence, Jane settled herself on the verandah to write letters.

She was anxious to occupy her thoughts, as lately they had become a little unmanageable. She no longer cared to sit doing nothing, or sewing to pass the time. She preferred to read or write so that worrying things might not recur and harass her. It had become almost too much an effort of will to put them away altogether, and they returned whenever her mind was unemployed, to torment her. This morning they had proved too troublesome for comfort. She had heard Daisy and Harry talking on the verandah in quiet undertones. Then long silences had followed, occasionally broken by Daisy's laugh. From where she sat in the drawing-room she could hear the low murmur of their voices, and to her anxious ears it had proved a disquieting sound.

She had just started a mail letter to Guy when her husband came and sat down near her. He read quietly for a few minutes, then laid down his paper, and cleared his throat noisily. His chair creaked under him. He pushed it back farther into the verandah and took up the "Pioneer" again. Then there followed such a storm of rustlings, cracklings, and shufflings that Jane felt obliged to lay down her pen. She knew the signs well, but this afternoon they irritated her strangely. She saw quite plainly that he had something to tell her. He always went through this phase of restlessness before unburdening his mind. She felt she must get it over. The quickest way in the long run was always to let him say it.

"I have something to tell you, Jenny," he said solemnly, emerging from the shelter of his paper, and smoothing it noisily out upon his knees.

"Anything serious?"

"Well, I'm afraid you won't like it much. But you've got to know, and sooner rather than later, as I said to myself just now. We must face these things, not hide from them, but I'm afraid . . ."

"Oh dear, and I'm feeling tired as it is. Anything from home?"

"Oh dear, no, nothing of the sort. How you do jump to conclusions. But I feel you ought to know. I've been wondering quite how to tell you. Been turning words and sentences over and over in my mind. I was afraid, as you're so fond of her, you might be rather upset, that's all. Bad news from home? Oh dear, no."

"Bob, you ought to know by this time that I can't bear having things broken to me—if you call this breaking," said Jane testily. "Let me have it at once."

"Oh, all right, all right. Don't worry, Jenny. Unless you take very good care you'll become like Mrs. Jansen. Now that reminds me; I wonder how she'll like it. Uncommonly little, I should say. That's another thing, by the way, that I've noticed."

"You forget that you've not told me anything yet."

"No more I have. Let me see, what was it? Oh, yes. Has it ever struck you, Jenny, that Daisy and Harry are becoming fond of each other? I shan't blame you if you haven't, but still you *think* you are so sharp . . ."

"Bob."

"Yes, dear?"

"You ask me if I've noticed it? My answer is—exactly three weeks ago—just about as soon as you realised she was here. When you were bothering about taking her to dances I knew it was no good. Then you made an endless fuss about getting that nice Sapper boy to dine, as you liked

him so much, and thought he and Daisy would hit it off. I didn't worry, but I let you do it."

"Oh . . . " said Mr. Turner, rather taken aback. "So that was why you were so slack, was it? So you did see about it after all? Well, you are an observant woman," he added with a touch of pride. "I always said so. It didn't seem like you to be so dense. Three weeks ago? Dear me."

He stopped fidgeting and looked gravely at his wife. It puzzled him a little that she had not run to him with the story. He wished he knew the thoughts that were passing in her mind.

"You are not surprised?" he asked tentatively.

"Not about his share of it," she answered quickly. "Were not that dimple and those waves of hair made for a situation like this? Her absolute simplicity and lack of coquetry are fatal to a man like Harry. But her side of it. . . . Yes, I confess, I wonder."

"You are not pleased about it?" he asked after a little. Jane paused.

"In a way I'm pleased," she said slowly. "In a way I'm not. I was glad when I realised that he cared; it seems her due. But when I saw how it was with her . . . I felt . . . Oh! it's so difficult to explain! She seems such a child to start adapting herself to another person—and that's what marriage with Harry will mean—an endless fitting in on the part of his wife."

"But he's been much jollier since all this came about," said Mr. Turner. "He talks more for one thing. Of course, he hates every other man she speaks to, and can't see that another pretty woman exists. But that's normal. I thought the same."

"Yes. But do men always keep up that attitude?" asked Jane dryly.

Mr. Turner considered this. He turned it this way and that. He was visibly worried. He was not going to answer in a hurry.

"I can't conscientiously say I think you the prettiest woman in the station," he said after a pause. "But that's beside the mark. You're the woman I want. Doesn't that cover everything? We've got along all right . . ."

"Dear Bob—I know it does. But is it much good comparing ourselves to Daisy and Harry?"

"Well, I suppose we are a bit different. Temperament—all that sort of thing," he said vaguely. He began to feel very much out of his depth. After all he had told Jane nothing she did not already know. But he had pointed out to her that he had noticed it too. That ought to show her the man he was.

"Well, don't worry yourself about it," he said after a little. "It's done, I'm sure. I don't believe all the talking in the world would move Daisy now—and I respect her for it. Those fragile-looking little things generally have a great deal of determination. Harry is not everybody's fancy—but he's hers, there's no doubt."

"You're quite right, dear. That's why I am offering no advice," said Jane a little sadly. "But I have a feeling against it—I can't tell what. She seems to me so young—so very young."

"She must marry someone sometime."

"So pathetically young—in mind," repeated Jane. "I wonder if I ought to have had them here together. But they would have met sooner or later, and *it* would have happened. I feel it—I know it. It started the first moment he saw her—and after that it was too late."

As she was speaking she realised that the sense of uneasiness in her mind had increased. Perhaps it was that she had discussed it with her husband, and that before she had put it resolutely away, not allowing it time to declare itself. Now she knew that in spite of her affection for Harry, there was hardly a man in the station whom she would not have sooner chosen for Daisy. An intangible, unexplainable feeling of dislike of the idea of their marriage had taken

possession of her. She knew it to be unreasonable, foolish, without foundation, but there it was, strengthened by the conversation with Bob, not to be denied or explained away.

"I don't know what would happen to the child if it didn't come off," she said slowly, after a pause. "She seems to be utterly changed—as a thing like that *does* change a girl. I want them to become engaged, but yet. . . . I can't explain it, Bob, but in a way I dread it. . . ."

"I've never heard you go on like this before, Jenny," said Mr. Turner. "Why you patched up the engagement between Lucy Evans and that young Civilian. You never mentioned responsibility or that sort of thing, that I know of. And as for Ivy Lewis and Mr. Applin, why you simply drove them on to the back verandah, and kept the other people off till they'd fixed it up. I saw you do it."

"I can't help it, Bob. I feel different. I have learnt to love Daisy. Ivy and Lucy were dear girl friends—she's like my own child. Besides, Arthur Price and Mr. Applin were the sort of men whom you'd *know* would make their wives happy. I couldn't forgive myself if this didn't turn out well."

"But you've done nothing—absolutely nothing. You said so yourself," said Mr. Turner, amazed. "Why, you practically proposed to Price for Lucy, or vice versâ, you know you did, it's no good denying it. And now you go on like this just because two young people have met at your house. I shouldn't have told you about it if I'd known you'd take it in this way," he added with entire forgetfulness.

"There's one thing which makes me glad," she said slowly.

"Tell me about it."

"Daisy won't go through life missing one of its best experiences," she said quietly.

"What's that?"

Jane put her hand softly over her husband's.

"Being in love," she said gently.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Daisy had appeared Harry had entered, at first unconsciously, upon a new phase of experience. He had disliked the thought of her coming, shrank from the idea of intercourse with her, expected infinite boredom from vapid chatter and feminine stupidity.

He had loved her at once, with the simplicity and entirety of a first passion. From the moment that she had stepped across the threshold of his life she had taken up an all-important place in it. She had dwarfed everything immediately. At first, though he did not realise it, she had filled the horizon to the exclusion of all else.

The days became filled for him with little things. It was as if the word trivial had dropped away utterly from his vocabulary. Her most trifling action, her every word became for him important and momentous. He liked to watch her as she flitted about the bungalow, busy on little tasks for Jane. Sometimes she would take the stiff, conventional bunches of flowers from the mallie, and arrange them daintily in vases and bowls with a thoughtful air of importance and responsibility. Then she would watch the dirzie as he stitched on the verandah making her some thin clothes with a gravity that seemed tremendous. Sometimes she would sit beside Mr. Turner, talking lightly, now about this thing now about that, and Harry would watch them and remember every word she said. He noticed that pink was her favourite colour, that it appeared in her waistband, or in her hat; that she disliked strangers and society, and would shrink up into herself in an unfriendly atmosphere; that she was the very incarnation of daintiness and freshness in her pretty muslins and flower-trimmed hats.

She began by interesting him, filling him with wonder, amusing him with her gentle gravity and air of importance. He would smile quietly at her childish ways, her crude opinions, the curious obstinacy that she sometimes showed. But always, merry or gay, grave or happy, she held his attention. His interest in her deepened with every trifling act and word.

He would follow her into the garden, and watch her from a distance, absorbed and patient, ready to join her directly she was alone, looking at anyone who talked to her with sullen anger. Then when they departed in trap or car he would attach himself to her, find a shady corner, and by some word or phrase get her to talk and tell him everything about her self and life.

"You see I was always—alone," Daisy would say softly.

"How was that?"

"I never really belonged, you see, to any circle. I always seemed just arriving or about to go off. I had no niche—anywhere."

"I see," he answered gently. "Tell me more—all your life. I'm interested."

"Yes, I know you are. I feel it."

"In everything. I can't bear not to know. There mustn't be any part of your life that I am shut out of. Shut out of," he repeated moodily. "It can't be. You mustn't let it be like that. I didn't like it yesterday——"

"Yesterday? What happened then?"

"Oh, you talked of having been in Scotland, and Mrs. Turner understood. You'd told her all about it. But I had never heard you'd been there."

"Well, it was always like that—no niche, no place. I never really had a position like other girls. If I'd been different I could have carved it out—but I'm not. I took it all as it was. I couldn't seize things by force of will, it isn't in me. But worst of all—I've had very little real affection."

"That I can't understand."

"Yes, hardly any—only tolerance—till I met Jane."

He looked at her tenderly, thoughtfully, with the loving criticism that lingers over its inspection. What a child she seemed! How ill-equipped for such a position. Her simplicity made an irresistible appeal to him. All the protective instinct which had slumbered in him so long was waking to life. Certainly she had met Jane, but also himself. What a difference it might make. If only she would let him make the difference. If only she could be brought to see what his tenderness and love might mean to her. The very atmosphere she had complained of would disappear. He would surround her with a better and warmer one.

He would sit and watch her working with an absorbed interest. She seemed to him to display a skill almost incredible. The speed with which the needle was driven in and out, the little dainty holes she would cut and then sew up; the trails and flowers of her embroidery filled him with wonder and astonishment.

He would smile as he watched her flitting about the garden with Jane. Her ineptitude at games caused him much tender amusement. With another girl he would have been irritated and a little disillusioned. In her it simply accentuated a certain helplessness that enthralled him. When the croquet ball flew off at an unlooked for angle he retrieved it patiently, and disliked Jane for her strong, straight shots and skill at running hoops. He felt an unreasoning anger when she won, and found difficulty in preventing himself from expressing it.

Then another time it would be:

"No, I don't want to go to this dance that Jane is talking about. I don't want to be among strangers even for an hour or two. I wish to be with people who like me."

"Love you. Why don't you say people who love you?"

"No, no—they can't do that yet." She demurred gently at the word. "Not love. How can they?"

"Yes, love you. That's what I mean."

"Not yet," she insisted quietly. "I've never been good at attracting that. Jane can't love me yet . . . perhaps in time . . ."

"Oh, Jane! I wasn't thinking of Jane."

But she would ward him off with a sort of gentle determination. She would not let him explain. She liked to skim lightly from subject to subject, avoiding the stronger currents. It was almost as though she meant to ignore his meaning, had not noticed that he had hung about all the morning on the chance of speaking to her, was determined to attach no importance to his words.

But all the while she was thinking. "All my life I've been marking time, waiting for a crisis . . . for something it was bound to give me . . . and it's this . . . it's this."

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One afternoon Harry took Daisy for a drive. She had demurred at first, pretending that Mr. Turner wanted her, but when that gentleman artlessly disclaimed all desire for her companionship she climbed into the trap by his side very happily.

"Where shall we go?" he asked as they turned out of the drive into the bright sunshine of the Mall.

"Oh, anywhere."

"Shall we go westward towards the Hills, or down the road by the canal?"

"No," said Daisy with sudden determination. "Take me to the City—that's where I want to go."

"To the City? Why to the City?"

"Because it interests me. Mr. Turner drove me there last week, but he hurried so, I couldn't see enough. I don't like that—I want to see it properly."

"I didn't know you were so interested."

"Yes, but I am. That's what I want."

"Very well. The City it shall be."

They turned eastward, and had soon left the cantonment with its gardens and bungalows behind, passing along the road which leads past gaol and hospital and the walls of the fort, towards the great gates of the City.

"Look at the mimosa bushes. They really are budding at last," said Daisy.

"Yes, it means that spring is here."

"And the hills to-day look almost misty. Mr. Turner says that means the cold weather is really over."

"I should like it to go on—and on."

"How monotonous," said Daisy lightly.

"You know what I mean. I've never felt like that before."

"And never will again?" she asked gaily.

"For no other person. It's my first experience. It sounds absurd—but it's true."

"Do look at that cart. Surely in a minute the pony will walk right out of the shafts. What a country India is for knotted bits of string and things tied on together. I believe that water buffalo means to charge us. How fierce he looks! No, he prefers the other side of the road."

"Absolutely my first experience," repeated Harry.

"No, you may not believe it—but it's true."

"I didn't say I didn't believe it."

"But you don't quite—yet."

"Perhaps not. Or it may be that I don't want to believe," she replied gaily. "I've heard of girls . . ."

"Well, you soon will, whether you like it or not," he answered rather grimly. "Very soon there won't be any room in your mind for doubt. I shall convince you—I must. Oh! here we are."

They were close to the gate of the City now. A steady stream of traffic was passing along with them towards it. As they moved the peculiar acrid dust of India rose about them, powdering the mimosa bushes and shisham trees, enveloping the droves of heavily-laden donkeys, hanging like a veil over the bullock-carts and ekkas.

A country cart full of laughing, chattering men bound for some festivity, with flowers tucked into the folds of their turbans, drew up to let them pass. A sweetmeat seller, sitting beneath a strip of awning slung up to shade him from the sun, sat just outside the gate, and looked up apathetically at them.

"Some day I mean to get some of those sweets," said Daisy, looking eagerly at the little bowls and baskets.

"Jane won't let you. Imagine Mr. Turner's horror! He detests all things 'of the country.' Now are you quite sure you want to go in?"

"Yes, yes, I do. Don't argue with me. I want it very much."

"What a typical globe-trotter it is! Well, I suppose you must be humoured. I wonder how soon you'll have had enough!"

"You don't like it? You're bored?"

"Oh, I like it well enough. And I'm never bored—now."

They turned in at the big gate, and drove towards the heart of the City. From the fretted balconies a few people looked down upon them curiously, the passers-by moved out of the road to let them go by, a bullock-cart, heavily curtained, creaked noisily out of the way. Daisy looked eagerly about her. She was right when she said that the City fascinated her. Every person in that little side street interested her, from the babies that played in the road, to the men who sauntered idly along the path. She looked at the tall, irregular houses, up to the flat roofs above, through the crazy carved doorways with delight. It all meant mystery to her, and she had a child's love of adventure. That she should be driving through this native city, full of new sights and sounds, with Harry, seemed to fill her cup of happiness. She loved to bend forward and look into the booths by the roadside, see what she could of the temples as they stood shining in the sun, watch the veiled women as they passed from court to court.

They turned into the big bazaar, and for the moment she was confused by the swarming crowds, the noise of hammering, the dull babel of sound that goes to make up the voice of the East. Knots of eager-looking men pushing, gesticulating, talking, seemed to her to be collected round each booth, and inside the busy workers, each intent and absorbed, hardly raising their eyes or turning their heads.

“Is this where they make the brasswork?”

“Yes. They’re always at it. That tapping goes on all day, and on into the night. It’s unceasing—never ending.”

“It’s as if they were working their thoughts into it,” said Daisy, watching them. “What a life! And in the middle of this great idle throng too!”

They passed up the bazaar to where the biggest caravanserai in the City stood. A cavalcade had evidently just arrived from the uplands beyond the Khyber, and wild-looking tribesmen, with thick shaggy beards and long, fierce dark eyes, moved about among the ponies, unloading them. Two of them were trying to make a camel kneel down, and Daisy watched him with interest as he bubbled with rage, moved his head angrily from side to side, and finally subsided, snarling fiercely.

“They’ve made him do it. Now his pack’s coming off,” cried Daisy. “Look at him. He’s much quieter. It’s just what he wanted from the first.”

Harry did not answer. He was looking straight ahead of him, and he seemed suddenly to Daisy remote and silent. He appeared to her rather unresponsive. It was not, as she had feared, that he was not interested—he was too interested. She felt a little piqued.

“The sun’s fiercer to-day than it’s been before.”

“Then put up your parasol.”

She began to dislike the thronging crowd round the pony’s head. The trap hardly seemed to move. Then they had to pull up to let a wedding procession pass. They seemed surrounded by a swarming, busy, chattering crowd, each

man intent on his own business. Some beggars gathered round them and whined shrilly for alms.

"Isn't it time we thought of turning?" she asked at last.

"We're going right through."

"But I'm not sure that I like it."

"I can't turn now."

"Well, why not go faster? Oh, I wish you'd *answer*."

"Yes, yes. But there's no hurry," he answered indolently.

She spoke again sharply, petulantly:

"Get the syce to call out, then they'll move."

"What's that?"

"I don't want to stay here any longer. Oh, do let us be getting on. I don't care about the City very much."

But when the next crowd stopped the trap he forgot all about her wish to hurry. He pulled up the pony, and bending forward, looked straight ahead. He seemed to have forgotten that she was by his side.

"Are we going towards the gate now?" she asked presently.

He did not hear. He was watching a bargain being struck in a booth close by. He was following each gesture of the discussion with an intense interest. When the salesman calmly demanded an exorbitant price his eyes gleamed; he smiled as the purchaser pretended to walk away; then when the terms were at length arranged, and the two were chatting again as friends, he gave a soft sigh of relief.

A string of people passed in front of the trap on the way to a temple. The sun blazed down upon it, making the bright roof shine like gold. A man carrying a bird in a large wicker cage came close up to them smiling, and held it up before their eyes.

"No, no—we don't want to buy it——" Daisy shook her head vehemently.

She suddenly felt isolated and wounded. At first she had wondered at Harry's abstraction, now it hurt her. She could hardly believe that he had really become

unconscious of her existence. She had been so used to his attention and care that it seemed a dreadful experience to her to be shut out from it. She longed ardently to recapture it.

"Captain Oakes," she said softly, "it's good of you to have brought me, but now I'm tired. I want to get back to Jane and Mr. Turner. When we can get through do make a start. If they see you pull up they will get out of the way."

He looked at her and nodded absently, frowning a little at the interruption. Then he turned back again to the seething, eager crowd.

She felt cold, and knew that it was not only because the sun was going down. Harry was frightening her by his curious remoteness. It seemed extraordinary to her to be in this vast concourse of people with a man she felt for the moment had become a stranger.

A passing beggar bumped roughly into the trap, but Harry did not notice. A whining old woman, sparsely covered with rags, hung on to one of the wheels.

"Come," cried Daisy sharply, "I want to go on. I don't like this bazaar. I want to get home."

The syce got down from the back seat, and began to push a way through. He shoved, and jostled, and hustled a path for the trap. One young man in a saffron-coloured turban resisted playfully, and the others called good-temperedly to him. The man with the bird-cage came up again, and watched the scene with enjoyment. A donkey, heavily laden, stopped stupidly in their path, and amid much laughter from the crowd the syce bundled him out of the way, pushing and pulling by turns.

A word from Harry would have stopped it—but he did not give it. One energetic order would have sent the laughing, idle throng out of the way, cleared a passage for them to the gate of the City, and made the bird-cage man realise, once for all, that these were no buyers. Instead of which he sat, bending forward, looking at them all with

good-tempered, watchful eyes, not caring whether Daisy were frightened or not.

When at last they started up a side alley that led to the gate of the City, and the syce had swung himself up again on the back seat, she leant back, shivering slightly.

"Now you've seen one of the most interesting sights in Northern India—a big City," said Harry, as they passed out of the gates and turned down the road which led to the cantonment. "How did you like it?"

"I didn't like it at all," said Daisy sharply.

He looked at her in surprise.

"Not at all? What do you mean?"

He still seemed a little absent, and the sight angered her.

"No—not at all," she answered resentfully. "I won't go there with you again. I wouldn't have gone at all if I'd known. I wish—oh, how I wish—I hadn't."

"Poor child, you're cold," he said gently. "We stayed there too long."

"Not again," she repeated. "I don't know what I should do if you took me there again. I hate going there."

"You're over-tired. I see what it is—Jane has been tiring you out, over-doing you, not taking half the care of you she ought."

"It's nothing to do with Jane. I'm not over-tired."

"Then what is it?"

"Why—it's you."

"How?" he asked tenderly, and tucked the rug in round her.

She pushed it angrily away.

"Tell me?" he asked gently. "I don't understand; but I want to know what's disturbing you."

"You were different—in there." She nodded at the City wall that skirted the road. "You've never been like that before. You made me feel as if I wasn't wanted. I was sitting by your side, but I felt miles away, as if all the crowds were between us. It isn't only that you were interested—

you were more—you were absorbed. I can't understand it . . . you were strange . . . so very strange. . . ."

"Absorbed? What do you mean?"

"I'm interested," went on Daisy unhappily, "I've been interested in the country from the moment I landed. I love the bazaars, and the caravans, and the temples. I like nothing better than to watch the people who pray at those little shrines, or bands of pilgrims setting out, or a native procession. I love the colours one sees everywhere, the cry of the sweetmeat sellers, the funny smell even that means India. It all appeals to me. But with you it's different. Just now you forgot everything."

"Oh, surely not. I don't think you mean that."

"But I do—and I won't go there again with you. You forgot everything," she repeated obstinately. "You were carried away right out of yourself, beyond me. You were absorbed in it, and I felt as if there was a barrier between us. If I'd fallen out of the trap you wouldn't have noticed. I spoke to you several times, but you didn't hear."

"Didn't hear . . . ?" echoed Harry blankly.

"No, you didn't. I might have shouted, but it would have been no use. They pushed against the trap . . . and I was frightened . . . and I was alone."

"But I was there all the time."

"No, you weren't. You were far away. I was quite alone. But I won't go there again—at least not with you."

CHAPTER IX

THAT evening, after dinner, Jane went off to bed. She had been fighting a headache all day, and now the moment had arrived when she felt she must succumb to it. Mr. Turner had been the only one who had made any effort to talk at dinner, and finding that he met with very little response he said he must go round to the office and finish some business that night.

Harry smoked his cigarette on the verandah, and Daisy watched him from the drawing-room. Sometimes before, when it had not been too cold, she had joined him, and they had looked out together over the plain as the lights twinkled out one by one, and listened to the ekkas and country carts rattling by on their way to the City.

To-night she went off by herself to the drawing-room, and took up a book. She would rather have died than joined him now. The sensation of having been wounded was still very fresh in her mind. She had felt miserable at dinner, with the weight of misunderstanding upon her, and Harry had been unusually silent. Now she felt, as she sat huddled up in a corner of the sofa, listening to his footsteps outside as he walked to and fro in the darkness, as if utter blankness had descended upon her. He had forgotten her. His solicitude on leaving the City had been a pose. She was glad she had pushed the rug away. She wished she had thrown it out of the trap. She no longer counted with him. She had become so used to his care and undivided attention that now she felt herself defrauded and cheated. But above all was the sense of loneliness that she had thought she had done with forever. . . . It returned, and weighed heavily upon her. She was jealous—bitterly jealous—of

an interest that engrossed him. And it had seemed to her, as she said, a strange, unusual interest. With anything else she could have sympathised. This appeared to her to be outside the bounds of what she might have expected and prepared herself to meet. An overwhelming love of sport, a keen interest in his profession, a man friend who absorbed him.

But this . . .

Suddenly the door opened, and Harry came into the drawing-room.

"I've been thinking of what you said," he began abruptly.

Daisy looked up at him coldly. In the light of the lamp her small face looked pale and rather hard. She shivered a little, and drew more into the corner of the sofa.

"I wish you wouldn't let in such a draught. It's cold."

"I'm so sorry. I'll make up the fire."

"No, don't trouble. I am going to bed soon."

"There's a blaze! No, don't go yet. I must talk to you. I've been thinking."

"Well, what of it?"

He sat down facing her.

"It's true how you described me. I have been turning it over in my mind. I was absorbed—I didn't know it at the time—I suppose I wasn't conscious of it. But I did forget—everything. I see now I did."

Daisy looked at him steadily.

"You forgot *me*," she said quietly.

"Yes. I never thought I could, but, for the moment, I did. I can't deny it. It would be no good. You say you spoke to me, over and over again. That shows how far off I was. But if I did it's about the only moment I've forgotten you since I've known you."

"You forgot me utterly."

"But it's the only time," he repeated. "I became absorbed."

"That's what I said—absorbed."

“Then it made you unhappy?”

“Of course. I felt shut out. As if I didn’t matter.”

“I was interested, not in an ordinary way, and when I’m like that . . .”

“Then you’ve been like that—often before?” she asked sharply.

“Not often—once.”

“When was that? Oh, don’t tell me if you don’t wish it. What does it matter how I feel?” she cried childishly.

“I’ll tell you if you’ll listen.”

“Well, I’m waiting.”

“It was just before I came out here. We were staying at Eastbourne for the summer holidays. We were rather a disunited family—but my father wouldn’t see it. At least, I was disunited. I had no wish to be with them at all. He had an idea of holding us all together. How I hated it! I wanted to be off on my own. I loathed the bathing mornings and shrimping parties, and the troops of hatless girls, and braying bands. I longed to get away from them all.”

“Yes, you would—I can see it quite well. You’d hate it all.”

Daisy was interested. She looked at him more kindly now. A little colour had come back into her cheeks—she seemed softer, more approachable. The hardness had gone out of her voice.

“It was either one thing or another,” went on Harry. “The girls were insatiable. My father, who hated turning out in the evenings, generally deputed me to take them about. Well, one night they persuaded me to go to an entertainment. What was it like? Oh, the usual sort of thing. I hardly noticed who it was who sang, or what it was they played. I remember that the people at the back of us were eating sweets out of a bag, and it rustled.

“At last a stout woman got up to sing. I can see her now! She had on a pink dress which strained at the seams.

Her gloves were dirty, and there were red strips of arm above them. Her hair was done up with an elaborate comb. Her voice was not better than a hundred others, she had no finish or particular grace.

"She sang a little Indian song, and in it she expressed all the mystery of the East. Perhaps it had been the romance in her sordid, struggling life; perhaps she had heard it first in some far-off bazaar . . . I can't tell."

"But what was the effect on you. How did you like it?" asked Daisy eagerly. "Did it make you forget—everything?"

"Yes, everything. That was the most extraordinary thing of all. Absolutely everything."

"Describe it to me."

"I felt as if some chord of memory in me was being struck—as if I was responding to it . . . answering . . . as if it was familiar to me, almost as though I had listened to it over and over again. And I felt the possibility of living and enjoying keenly. I was lifted right out of myself. I knew I was capable of something headlong."

"Then she stopped. Her speaking voice was horrible. I was again conscious of her untidiness and the tawdry dress. There was nothing about her to explain the effect her song had had upon me."

"Then what was it?"

"Just that—I was absorbed. I was lifted right out of myself and my surroundings. I forgot the shuffling of my neighbours' feet, the rustling of their bag of sweets, the braying of the band on the sea-front. I was drawn away into something else."

"And you felt like that in the City to-day?"

"Yes," he admitted unwillingly, "I did. Till we went out of the gates. Then I remembered you. I'm a brave man to tell you."

"But I knew it," said Daisy calmly. "And that's what hurt me. I admit it," she added shyly. "It was so

different to what you usually are. I've never had to complain of being forgotten before."

He got up, and stood looking down upon her. Already the remembrance of the afternoon was fading from his mind. The charm that Daisy had always exerted over him had again taken possession of him. He was once more conscious of her smallest action. As she put up her hand and smoothed away a strand of hair, then straightened a ribbon on her dress, he was intensely aware of her. She seemed to him, at that moment, absorbing, entrancing. As she sat with her small fair head bent down, she struck him as very young, and small, and soft, and rather alone. When she looked up at him from time to time her eyes seemed gentle, and as if they held some sort of appeal to him. She had fascinated him from the first by her obvious youth, her helplessness. She had always appeared childish beyond belief, ill equipped for any struggle, a straw borne along by the current of life. Now as he watched her, her slenderness, her fragility, her sadness struck him anew, and all interest in other things died in him. . . . He longed to answer that appeal, stand between her and all the buffets of life, be answerable for her happiness and well-being.

She looked up at him and caught his look of devotion. She read it in his dark eyes and steady look. And she knew at that moment, without a doubt, that Harry was hers to hold or cast away.

He had pained her that afternoon, but his happiness lay in her hands. His love and tenderness were hers, and for the first time she knew it, without a doubt or backward thought. She had imagined vaguely that his words and glances could mean nothing else, but now she realised it, and as the knowledge came to her the flame of jealousy flickered down and died utterly. It could not live in the light of that realisation. Before she had only guessed, and hoped, and wondered. Now she knew. . . .

"I see," she said, "I really see. Don't let's talk any

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more about it," she went on childishly. "Or any other horrid thing. It's over and—I understand."

"Then you'll forget it?"

"I don't think we'll go there again," she said softly. "Oh, yes, if you like it, we will. I don't mind. I shan't mind again. It's different."

"What's different!"

"You see—you've explained."

He was not conscious of having given much explanation. The whole scene of the afternoon now seemed so very far away. The only thing that seemed real was that she had listened and understood.

"What is different?" he repeated gently.

"Oh! how I feel. I don't mind—if you like it."

"I like anything you do."

"Yes, yes. But I don't mind. It doesn't seem to matter now."

"We'll drive to the Gardens to-morrow . . . and then there's the next day . . . and the next . . ."

"Yes, and all the other days," she agreed softly.

CHAPTER X

MR. TURNER was right—nothing would turn Daisy now. Anyone who thought it possible would only need to look at her clear eyes, her soft lips firmly set, her whole bearing of satisfied content.

The experience had come to her early, but it had come—of that there could be no doubt. It had not stolen upon her slowly in imperceptible degrees. She had not been led down its path gently and tenderly, one exquisite vista after another being revealed at every bend of the road. It had come rather in an overwhelming onslaught, sweeping her along with it like a straw before the wind, overwhelming, compelling.

Her gentle nature was stirred to its depths. She had never felt anything like this before. She had had fancies, for the music-master at home, the doctor, the handsome second officer on board ship, but they had passed and been forgotten, leaving no permanent impression on her mind. The memory of them now made her smile as at a contrast. What shallowness had masqueraded under the name of love! How grave had been her mistake in confusing the real with the unreal. When she had read of it in books it had seemed to her incomprehensible, overdrawn, exaggerated. Now she knew the half had not been told her. She compared the description of some lover with what she herself felt. She was like a person who recognises a portrait. It was not they were writing of; every line now seemed to tell of a phase of feeling through which she was passing. With the narrowness of the unimaginative she believed that no one could write of what they had not themselves experienced.

They must all have loved as she did—she did not believe there was any other way.

The spring was beginning to stir in the orchards around the City, and to pass over the jheel like a whisper of life. It awakened the orange groves, and passed through the gardens where the students lay and chattered over their books under the trees. Along the hedges in the Mall delicate white roses appeared, to enjoy their short life before they withered in the heat. Every jasmine bush was covered with tiny white stars. To Daisy it seemed that it was for her that spring was blossoming; for her the violets had laid purple carpets in the bungalow gardens, the hills had shrouded themselves with softest mist, a veil of amethyst lay over the plain. The heavy scents which floated across from the Commissioner's garden, the long, hot nights, the pale, clear dawn, all seemed significant, personal. Some sense of beauty which had been sleeping in her, awoke, and struggled bravely to life. She had never really noticed before the changing lights on the sides of the hills, the whitewashed shrine at their feet, the golden sunshine, the burning blue of the sky, the evening shadows. Now it all seemed part of a whole, the wonder of which she had not yet divined.

Before when she had been the victim of some romantic fancy she had told it all to her dearest friend—or the next dearest. It did not much matter. She had chattered of how *he* had looked and what he had said, as long as the listener would give ear. But now she had no wish to talk. She preferred to think quietly by herself in her bedroom, or in a corner of the bungalow garden. She gave vague and abstracted answers to Jane and Mr. Turner, bewildered the ayah with confusing orders, and took no interest in the subalterns who had now discovered that she was a pretty girl. That others should know, and discuss, and criticise seemed a desecration. Mrs. Taylor's prosaic comments would be intolerable. She longed to keep this beautiful

thing to herself for a little, not listen to stupid talk, and watch the bloom being rubbed off by idle fingers. Daisy knew that she even shrank from mentioning it to Jane. The prospect of the inevitable discussion chilled her a little. She felt, instinctively, that it was not what her friend would have chosen for her, that in the elder woman's attitude there was sadness, apprehension, even a little dismay. For the first time in her life she was glad of her singular aloneness in the world. There was no one beyond an uncle, some cousins, and a friend here and there, who would care in the least what became of her. She was answerable to no one. She hoped that Mr. Turner would not range himself against her. She tried to understand his attitude by tentative probings. She even began to speak about Harry once or twice, to learn his point of view. But the subject dropped like a stone in the water. Mr. Turner seemed suddenly affected by a heavy silence, a total disinclination to pursue the conversation. He began to talk about something else with obvious haste.

She, who had never seriously opposed her will to anybody's, who had been too pliant, too ready to yield to the last speaker, now clung to her purpose with a tenacity which surprised even herself. She knew that now nothing—no arguments, advice, or even tears—would induce her to relinquish Harry. She had learnt to love him, and in that fact she found a certain finality.

Sometimes Jane would come with them on their expeditions, and they would drive in the big gharry along the road which leads, like a straight white ribbon, to the very feet of the Frontier hills themselves. It was all beautiful to Daisy, seen through a glamour, shrouded in the mists of romance. She was passing through the time of her life to which, in after years, women look back with tenderness and longing, and very often with a sort of retrospective pity for themselves.

One morning Mr. Turner took herself and Jane down by

train to Attock, to see the great bridge spanning the Indus, but the day was flat and tame. For no reason that anyone could arrive at, but with the strange vagaries of a lover Harry refused to come too. The Turners and Daisy spent the day in the dâk bungalow overlooking the plain, and one of them counted the hours till they should return. On getting home they found Harry more morose than usual. He had spent the day tormenting himself with the idea that Daisy did not want him, was happier alone with her friends, all the foolish imaginings which mark the final stage of love before the crisis. He would hardly speak, went off to the Club after dinner, and talked of the engagements he had made for the following week with an attempt at gaiety. This mood lasted for days—with variations. He alternated between that and a heavy gloom. He behaved with a disconcerting erraticness, was subject to complete changes of plan, and generally at the last moment, disorganised any expedition in which he had a part.

"I can't understand them—I can't understand them at all," said Mr. Turner unhappily. "It seems to me such a queer way of going on."

"You don't understand your own sex, then," replied his wife.

"But surely I never went on like that?"

"How often must I remind you that you are not the universal model?"

"But it's so irrational, so . . . oh, I don't know. But this sort of thing *bothers* me, Jenny, it does indeed. I asked him to drive Daisy round to the Jacksons', and he said he must go in the opposite direction. Had to see a man about a pony—could not possibly make a change of plan."

"Human nature is a little more complicated than you thought—that is all. When desiring a thing ardently, it goes through a stage of dallying with it, pretending indifference. It is the last flicker before the final collapse."

But it is a trying stage to watch, as Jane found to her cost. However much one may philosophize and explain it to one's husband, it has its dark moments. Mercifully for all concerned, in this case, it was not unduly prolonged. The day that Harry contradicted Daisy flatly, as Jane pointed out to Mr. Turner, the crisis was approaching. The proposal could not be far off now. It was a sure sign that things were approaching a climax. When she flirted openly with young Dacre, and dressed herself in mauve—a colour to which Harry had a rooted objection—Jane also pronounced it to be a good omen. She professed herself as quite satisfied with the course of the affair. It was running as smoothly as true love will allow.

One evening she made her husband take her for a drive, and declined to invite Daisy to come too, in spite of Bob's suggestions. She disliked an overcrowded trap, she persisted, and wanted a quiet chat with him alone. When they had started, however, a long silence fell between them, which Mr. Turner made occasional efforts to break. But Jane was not to be drawn into any chit-chat. She answered him absently and with no interest, so the conversation languished and came abruptly to an end.

Harry, who had gone off to the Club, returned early, to find Daisy alone on the verandah. He was seized with a sudden gust of anger with the Turners for having left her. It struck him as unkind and rude. There was only one other thing he felt he could not forgive—that was if they returned. He could not face the prospect with any calmness. It would be utterly unpardonable if they thought she could not be happy without them—if they hurried back from any mistaken idea of their duties.

When they did come home, an hour later, Daisy Temple and Harry Oakes were engaged.

CHAPTER XI

How often have we not all gone through the sensation of seeing a crisis approach, dreading its coming, unable to see past it into the future, then welcoming it like a friend, rejoicing at the ending of suspense, thankful because at last we know the worst?

What has been the uneasy presence at our bedside, the vague, subconscious trouble that seems to follow us even in our sleep, the tireless companion of our hours of repose, becomes the joyful comrade of the daylight, the creature we so gaily take about with us.

Directly Jane returned from her drive, and realised the state of affairs, she went through this phase. If one glance at Harry had not told her everything, one at Daisy would have done it. The very atmosphere of the verandah seemed to have something electrical about it, and the bungalow almost shouted at her that romance had passed that way. As she chatted brightly about their drive, the people they had seen, the dust that had risen in clouds behind the car of the City magistrate, the untidy state of Mrs. Welsh's compound, her brain was working actively. She was adjusting herself to the new conditions, and with the adaptability of her kind, reviewing the aspects of the case and calling to order her own distrustful, wandering thoughts. She saw at once that now she must face the situation, never again discuss its desirability, only look forward to the future with hope and confidence. Daisy had chosen for herself, with the contradictory foolhardiness of the young: She had counted as nought Jane's experience, young Dacre's prospects—he had taken to haunting the bungalow

—and all Emily Taylor's advice and platitudes. She had made her choice, and that it had passed beyond the region of fancy, it was only too easy to see. Jane had the justice to bestow one swift passing thought upon the civilian to whom she herself had given the order to retreat. He would have been an excellent match for her; she remembered her mother's words on the subject. But she had boldly claimed the right to select her life's partner.

She sent the ayah away, and started to dress for dinner. All the time she was conscious of a sensation of relief. The tension was over. She could sleep to-night, not toss about while her brain retraced the old familiar paths. The soundness of her husband's slumber would no longer vex her. She could even hear the chowkidar's cough—which he only simulated to show he was awake—without annoyance. It was decided without her advice being asked or given. Daisy—the most pliable of creatures—had taken the momentous step without a hand to guide her. She had followed her instinct with the unwavering faith of a child, she . . .

“How much longer is this going on?” Mr. Turner's dressing-room door was suddenly flung open, and he appeared round it, flushed, rather dishevelled, and wholly annoyed.

“Going on? What, dear? I don't . . .”

“Why Daisy and Harry, of course. When I wanted to marry you I didn't let twenty-four hours go by before you knew it. And yet Oakes spends days and weeks—and for all I can tell—months, dallying about, looking like I don't know what—something very unpleasant, anyway—till we're all worn to shadows with the suspense.”

“But they are engaged,” said Jane amazed. She was in the act of putting a jewelled dagger into her hair, but stopped and looked at her husband with consternation.

“Did she tell you?”

“No-o. I have not been alone with her. But I am sure of it. I saw it in their eyes directly we got home.”

“Pooh . . . rubbish. Never heard such nonsense. Is that all you’re building on?”

He was too astonished to fasten his collar, and stood with one end sticking out, the life-study of a clown in a circus.

“Is that all you’re building on?” he repeated.

“My dear, to think of your not seeing it after all! I should have thought that anyone. . . . But there! I know that you, like other observant people, are not always on the spot.”

“I don’t believe a word of it,” he went on obstinately. “Just because she looked bright and happy, and he less glum than usual. It’s preposterous the way you jump to conclusions. When d’ye suppose it came off?”

“Ten minutes before we arrived. Well, they’re two of my dearest friends,” said Jane loyally. “I’m glad—very glad.”

“In spite of all you’ve said?”

“That, my dear boy, you must please forget. I have put all that away. I only remember he is the fiancé of the girl I love. They’ve chosen each other, and we must try and believe that they’re wiser than we are. Now, do fasten your collar. If you knew what you looked like I’m sure you would.”

“I don’t believe a word of it,” he repeated as he shut his door, and Jane heard him tramping about his dressing-room muttering disconnectedly.

The happy atmosphere at the dinner-table penetrated even Mr. Turner’s consciousness. It spoke to him more eloquently than any words of his wife could have done. He became aware of it when the soup was on the table, and by the time the sweets came on he was convinced he had seen it from the first. While the others chattered he ruminated heavily to himself. In spite of Jane’s grumblings it was obviously the only possible thing to happen. Hard as she had tried to prevent it he now saw that, with his assistance,

the course of true love had been allowed to run smoothly. Various incidents of the past few weeks, trivial enough in themselves, gradually became magnified in his mind. There was the afternoon he had suspected a lover's quarrel, and manœuvred, with the greatest subtlety, to bring them together. That appeared to him as momentous. Then the evening that Daisy had seemed tired and flat. He had told her his best story, and she had laughed till the colour had come back to her cheeks. Harry had joined them on the verandah. He had not stopped at his best story. . . . He now saw the incident as something portentous. His own share seemed to him as that of a principal.

Who could be in the same house with Daisy—so he reasoned—and not love her? Who could hear her soft laugh, watch the slow smile and the suspicion of a dimple, see the light in her clear eyes, quite unmoved? Why even he himself. . . . Then, on the other hand, Harry, though not everybody's fancy, was not a bad sort of fellow after all. He had been described as good looking, and though a man of few words, those few were sound. He never bored others with useless chatter, he could hold his tongue at all times.

"Mr. Turner, Mr. Turner, are you never going to answer?"

"Bob dear, they have spoken to you three times."

He started violently, jerked out an answer, then became lost again in vague reminiscences. His own engagement stood out in his mind clearly this evening. He looked across at Jane with tenderness. She appeared to him exactly the same as the apple-cheeked, bright-eyed girl to whom he had proposed. He knew that the kind, comprehending look in her brown eyes meant more to him than all the beauty upon earth. He would go down to the City one of these days, and bring her back something that would remind her of this evening. When Daisy married they would settle down again into their old *tête-à-tête*, and he, for one, would not grumble. He would enjoy having her again more entirely at his disposal. He looked forward to the future

with a deep content. He only really bestirred himself to dine out because it pleased her. His own happiness lay at their fireside. He did not pause to think how often he gladdened this hour by slumber—not always inaudible—and how unsuccessfully Jane would try and rouse him to talk. He only remembered many peaceful evenings when he had talked or dozed as it seemed good to him. They had fitted in very well, he reflected optimistically. It really was wonderful the way married couples got to like the same things. But then he was one of the adaptable kind, and very lucky for Jane that he was, and not one of those overbearing, autocratic sort of men, who bend everyone to their own will.

“It’s no good, Daisy—he has one of his thinking fits.”

“I have been telling you all about it, Mr. Turner, and I don’t believe you’ve heard a word. I thought you’d be interested. . . .”

He roused himself to say all the right things—he was sure they were the right things. He believed that he surpassed himself in expressing his feelings suitably. Heard her? Of course he had, but that wasn’t necessary. He still had eyes, and knew how to use them. He was far sharper than they imagined. They were mistaken in thinking him absent. He could repeat, word for word, what she had told him, the very terms of the proposal, if that would please her. And now he supposed the two women wanted to talk by themselves, and he and Harry would have to kill time till they were allowed into the drawing-room.

If anyone could have heard the conversation which took place between Jane and Daisy after dinner, they would have imagined that the engagement was the dearest wish of the elder woman’s heart. She might have manœuvred and schemed for it, so gay did she appear, so enthusiastic was her delight. She looked the incarnation of the satisfied chaperon who, after some reverses, brings things to a happy issue, who sees her plans flourish in spite of all.

No one who could have seen her sitting on the sofa by the girl's side, her kind face beaming happiness, could have doubted her whole-hearted approval.

She had determined to cast no shade over Daisy's happiness. She would spare no effort to break down the reserve that had sprung up between them. She meant to win back her place in the child's confidence, whatever acting it might involve. She had no mind to act the prudent parent, the cautious guardian, who sees only difficulties ahead. She wished rather to be a sharer, a contemporary who sympathises. If words could have swayed the girl she should have had them, but Jane knew, without a doubt, that at the first sound of them, she would have withdrawn her hand and her confidence. She herself would, in that moment, have become for Daisy an elder, who preaches prudence at the expense of love. She would no longer have been asked to listen to the confidential stream. She would have been answered gently, even patiently, and then put on the outside of Daisy's circle ; become one who does not matter, a supernumerary who only walks on, without a part to play.

CHAPTER XII

MRS. TAYLOR invited the entire Turner party to dine a few days later. A chuprassi came round with a chit while they were at breakfast, and stood in the compound, his red tunic making a vivid blot of colour against the green.

Jane carefully studied the chit-book before she committed herself to an answer. As far as she could make out from the names of the people entered in it, they, young Dacre, and May Larcombe were to be the only ones invited. So, relying on the oldest way of finding out, which always enables the mem-sahib to be well informed of the company she is about to meet, she wrote an acceptance.

Mrs. Taylor had been told of the engagement the day after it was settled, more from a desire to appease her curiosity than for any other reason. She had taken to coming round to the pink bungalow on the thinnest possible of pretexts, while her sharp eyes darted about, and her questions gave some uneasiness. They had all agreed that it should not be officially announced, beyond this one exception, for a few days.

When they had been sitting in Mrs. Taylor's drawing-room a few minutes, it became obvious that somebody else was expected, and that this guest was late. The hostess glanced, a little anxiously, at the clock; she was obviously listening for the sound of a trap. It suddenly jingled up to the door, Mr. Taylor went out to receive his guests, and the cloud cleared from Emily's forehead.

When the door opened, Jane became aware that Mrs. Taylor had committed the indiscretion of asking the Jansens to meet them, and felt a momentary vexation. She hardly knew why, but the sight of Sybil, tall, slender, dressed in

softest black with one red rose cunningly placed in her dark hair, caused her some annoyance. Mrs. Jansen immediately made, in some indescribable way, every other woman appear clumsy and badly dressed. Her own blue satin she felt to be commonplace. Emily's laden head and chains and pendants appeared grotesque and ridiculous. Even the two girls looked suddenly very young, and almost insipid. The force of contrast—that most powerful of all agents—began its deadly work. Most certainly Jane felt it as she entered the room on Mr. Taylor's arm.

All through the meal she struggled with this sensation. A mirror which hung opposite to her continually and unkindly reminded her of the rather crude effect of her own dress. It lacked subtlety as much as Sybil's black draperies possessed it. She struggled, as course succeeded course, to show some sort of an interest in Mr. Taylor's observations. He was a sandy-haired little man, determined to do his best, and, as a rule, she ably seconded him, but to-night her voice sounded to her flat and tired. As she heard him pass from one subject to another she wondered he did not lose patience with her. She must be a trying guest, especially when one's wife has told one not to let the conversation flag at the upper end of the table, and who kept darting bright, questioning glances to see how things were progressing. With an effort she brought back her wandering attention, and listened to her host with painstaking care.

After dinner Colonel Jansen joined her in the drawing-room.

"I have been watching your little girl and a prettier child I believe I have never seen. You are satisfied?"

"Yes. Oh, yes."

"Your wish is realised. You have somebody to whom you can give advice. I have been very observant. I think it will be often asked, and, shall we say, sometimes taken."

"Have you learnt all that in one hour?"

"I repeat, I am very observant. Do you remember our talk at the dance? Have you had a sufficiency of nonsense poured into your ears? But there! I mustn't ask. I wish I was the sort of person to whom people tell their love stories."

"I believe you know everything that is worth knowing in the station. All the confidences pass through your hands."

"Not the foolish ones, and that's what interests me."

"Then make some women friends."

"But those I do make will tell me nothing. You, for instance, might be quite amusing—but no, you prefer to be obscure."

"You'll hear and understand all our foolishness quite soon enough, Colonel Jansen," said Jane, and to her own ears her voice sounded very sad. "I can't quite see why the folly of human nature interests you. At all events you must have plenty to wonder at. The field is inexhaustible."

"You are tired, and thinking of the hot weather. That always depresses one. I always know what that note means in a woman's voice. It is peculiar to India, and to separation."

"Bob has leave due to him."

"Then you are only tired. Ah, we are to have music."

May Larcombe began to sing, to Mrs. Taylor's accompaniment. She had a sweet, clear voice, very pleasant to hear, and used it without affectation. Everyone stopped talking to listen to her. The utter silence that is the highest compliment to the singer, fell upon them.

Mr. Taylor, who always seemed out of place at his wife's dinner-parties, and rather like an uninvited guest who only meets with toleration, drifted closer, and actually took a chair near the piano. Mr. Turner, who was sitting a little apart near Mrs. Jansen, stopped fidgeting his feet. Jane felt herself transported back to her childhood, and imagined herself in some green lane at home, picking the meadow-sweet in a hedgerow, while the birds sang around her,

and the sun flickered through the trees. She and her sisters had sung the song themselves. It seemed a part of their youth, and the old-fashioned house, and the twisted tree in the garden, and the scents of stocks and wallflowers as they floated through the window.

Outside, the shisham trees stirred gently beneath the stars. A shaft of moonlight lay across the lawn. The Frontier Hills looked down frowning at the cantonment. A native shuffling by along the Mall stopped to listen to the miss-sahib's voice, then moved on again, humming queerly to himself.

The song ended and the spell broke. A buzz of conversation started. Mrs. Taylor began to talk. A group collected round the piano.

"A romantic little song," said Mr. Turner to Mrs. Jansen.

"Very, but rather too sentimental. Flowers . . . thoughts . . . tears . . . memories . . . all the rest of it. I couldn't sing like that to a drawing-room full of people. I couldn't give myself away before a hostile audience."

"Hostile? Why hostile?"

"Oh, you know what I mean. Well, critical, if it pleases you better."

"Never that. I speak for myself. Talking of romance . . ." Mr. Turner began again patiently.

She interrupted him ruthlessly.

"How can they—that's what I want to know? Directly people *feel* it seems as if they must tell everyone about it. It's the craze of the age, to dissect. I couldn't. And what can Miss Larcombe know about memories at eighteen? I ask you." She shuddered theatrically.

"Talking of . . ." he began again.

"'Ssh," said Mrs. Jansen softly. "Another song. Dear me, I hope not the same kind. I couldn't stand that sort of thing again. But I expect Mr. Dacre will give us something more rousing."

Mr. Dacre did. He was a tired-looking young man, with a pronounced stoop. He might have been a scholar, most certainly he was not a sportsman. He had not quite mastered the air, neither was he sure of the words. He sang something about "Safe home at last in the eighteenth hole," and everyone felt that they really ought to feel tremendously amused.

Jane smiled feebly, Colonel Jansen even forced a laugh. Mrs. Taylor professed herself enormously entertained, and begged for another. Then, while Mr. Dacre was fetching his music from the hall, placed herself at the piano, and dashed off into a cascade of notes.

"I was going to tell you," Mr. Turner began again, under cover of some crashing chords. "An event of some interest has taken place. At least that's how we feel about it. 'Pon my word, my wife and I are quite excited about it. Miss Larcombe's song reminded me of it. Romance, don't you know, all that sort of thing."

"What has it suggested to you?"

But he had failed to catch his companion's attention. She was pretending to listen, but her abstracted expression irritated him. He knew she was paying him only the semblance of interest, that her thoughts, like her eyes, were over on the other side of the room where Captain Oakes stood. Mr. Turner had had to wait patiently through young Dacre's golfing song, and he might have to wait again if someone else raised their voice. Also he felt that unless he was quick, Jane would cut him out altogether.

"Harry and Daisy are engaged," he said suddenly. Now he had no reason to complain of lack of attention.

Mrs. Jansen's eyes widened. She faced him quickly. For the moment he knew that, for her, he was the only man in the room.

"What?" she asked sharply.

"Captain Oakes and our little Daisy are engaged," he went on, puffing out his cheeks and speaking pompously.

Mrs. Taylor came to a brilliant and totally unexpected conclusion. The calm of relief settled down upon the room. It seemed to have become very peaceful all of a sudden. But Mr. Turner wished the piano would strike up again. He almost wished for another golfing song, he would have welcomed even a second cascade. It made a noise—that was what he wanted.

Mrs. Jansen had become very still. The hand that had been fluttering her fan dropped to her side. She suddenly seemed to her companion to be very far off.

“Engaged?”

“Yes, yes. It is all fixed up. These young people can stand no delay. It was a case of love at first sight. With him, I mean. Then, of course I helped. Jane wasn’t of much use. I saw it at once, and pushed things along.”

She looked at him steadily without speaking.

“In cases like this you want an old hand at the game. The number of young people I’ve egged on! Just tact, you know. No advice—oh, dear no—and leaving them alone together—but not too long. It’s a science, Mrs. Jansen—that’s what it is.”

“He is in love?”

“Rather.”

She sighed faintly. He had an impression that she was disappointed, not so much at Harry’s engagement as at his choice. She looked across at Daisy steadily as she stood near the piano, then she turned to Mr. Turner.

“Sherpore makes a good setting,” she said quietly. “And Miss Temple is—very pretty. Look at her as she stands now.”

Mr. Turner suddenly felt very uncomfortable. Mrs. Jansen’s words did not please him. “Pretty” struck him as a cold, meaningless sort of word; the kind that one would apply to a blue ribbon, or a kitten’s eyes. He didn’t want to hear Daisy spoken of like this. He longed again ardently for the music. It occurred to him as unkind of

Jane—who could quite well have come over and helped him—to leave him so long talking to a woman she knew he didn't like. She could so easily have made an excuse to Colonel Jansen, and rescued him.

“What a pretty picture she would make.”

“Do you mean for a chocolate-box?” he asked rather surlily.

She hardly heard him. She was gazing at Daisy, as though for the first time. Perhaps before she had not been conscious of her existence. This evening, no detail of her appearance escaped her. She looked at her with an interest she was at no pains to disguise. The noisy chorus that Mrs. Taylor was leading seemed inaudible to her, the only figure visible in the group round the piano the fair-haired girl in the white dress.

“A pretty picture,” she said again. “Pink cheeks . . . grey eyes . . . a blue sash. What more could any man want?”

“I don't think Oakes does want anything more. He looks as if he thought a sweeter girl could not be alive.”

“No, no. That is just it.”

Harry's devotion seemed to amuse her. She laughed a little, softly, as a woman might who sees a child choose a tin soldier to play with when he ought to have outgrown such things.

“Quite devoted. It adds to the picture. The setting is perfect. I conclude our hostess knows—she has grouped them so well.”

“Jane told her,” Mr. Turner admitted.

“And you have told me.”

“Your eyes, Mrs. Jansen, would have done the same.”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Perhaps. Who knows? There is your wife getting up to say good-bye. The chorus is over and the eighteenth hole reached once more. We have finished with it for to-night, and I, for one, am not sorry to part with it.”

“Nor I,” said Mr. Turner. And he might have added a good deal.

“I wish you had not told her so brutally,” said Jane, as they were driving back in the gharry—Harry having been allowed to take Daisy in his trap. “Oh yes, it’s no good pretending not to know what I mean. But I wish you hadn’t.”

“Brutally? I, Jenny? Not the truth, I do assure you. I broke it as gently as I could. I led up to it step by step. I . . .”

“I heard you—I heard you distinctly.”

“I could hardly believe it was my own voice I heard. Tact? ’Pon my word, my dear, I didn’t know I had it in me. Could you have done it better yourself?”

“I *should* have done it myself if you had allowed me time. I think, at all events, I could have done it more diplomatically. But I was afraid of Emily giving the whole thing away before we had told Mrs. Jansen. Anyone could have guessed the engagement from her manœuvres and glances.”

“Just what she said—no, I said—I mean,” said Mr. Turner, stumbling heavily.

“Well, the whole station will know to-morrow, so it’s not of much consequence. Now, please drive carefully in at the gates. I have no wish to have my flowerpots knocked down twice in one day—and you have not the excuse of being in love.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE Jansens were dining together alone. In the soft shaded lights of the candles she looked a little less pale than usual. The shimmering silver of her dress threw up the darkness of her hair, and made her appear elusive and ethereal.

Her husband sat and watched her, after making a few unsuccessful efforts to break the silence. He was so accustomed to her moods that now they never surprised him, and he had learnt to adapt himself to them, and cultivate towards her a tolerant good-nature. Whether she sat through a meal depressed and distant, or chattered gaily, he always displayed towards her a steady patience. Perhaps in the early days of their married life he had demanded more of her and suffered disappointment. At one time he might have required from her some companionship and adaptability, a certain measure of responsiveness. However that might have been he now made no demands upon her. When she was silent he did not harass her with questions, when she laughed he joined in, showed her invariably a steady kindness and care.

To-night, as he watched her, there was pity in his expression. As she played with her wineglass and crumbled her bread, he looked at her tenderly, almost as though there were some cause of self-reproach in his mind. She struck him, as she sat opposite, as young and restless and ill-satisfied.

He had been aware for some time past that Sybil was going through a period of dissatisfaction and unrest. He had seen it in her varying moods, in the expression of her small, unhappy face. A hundred times a day she told him

by her irritation, her sudden caprices. He knew that she was passing through some storm of the emotions, and that she suffered. He felt powerless to help her, and it hurt him to feel himself of so little use. With a rare self-forgetfulness, he never gave a thought to his own discomfort.

After the Taylors' dinner-party he noticed that her unhappiness increased. She appeared to him more strained than usual. She either talked a lot or not at all, and was always out on some pretext or another. As the days passed he tried to get nearer to her with sympathy and gentleness, but she seemed to recede from him with a certain waywardness. She did not want help—only toleration. If her husband had been exacting and ill-tempered the position would have been unbearable. The days would have been filled with discord and misery. He always said to himself that if he himself had been different Sybil's life would have been a happier thing. He did not know in what he had failed, but felt if only he could have understood she would have had a better chance. His own intelligence appeared to him, at times, as opaque. He seemed groping in a world of mystery. Perhaps, unknown to himself, he understood better than he thought. Possibly his steady allegiance to the tolerant attitude insensibly steadied and calmed her.

As he sat watching her to-night a great pity came over him. She was as unstable as the wind, but called upon to play a responsible part. Her thin, fragile, ineffectual hands were like her, they could never grip essentials. She could pursue a fancy, grasp at a passing pleasure, passionately pursue the whim of the moment, but could she ever realise a happiness? Had she the capacity for affection or tenacity? Was she not torn, now this way, now that, by every passing feeling and emotion? She seemed to him as she sat before him, looking moodily in front of her, to be like some elemental caught in the meshes of a headlong passion, unable to resist or battle.

When they had finished he followed her at once into the drawing-room. She walked to the door, put it open, and stood looking out at the stars, and listening to a band that was celebrating the guest night of some mess. Across the plain, under the shadows of the hills, there glimmered the dull lights of a village. A caravan on its way to the City had halted at the foot of the garden on the high road, and the camels made strange bubblings and snarlings in the dark.

"Sybil, can you talk to me a little?"

She moved away from the door at the sound of his voice, and came towards him.

"They'll get to the serai in an hour if they hurry," she said softly. "Now they're off again! Can't you hear the drivers? I wish—I wish I could go with them."

"To some dirty go-down in the City?"

"Only to walk in the darkness with the pack-horses and the donkeys, to pad along through the dust under the stars."

"I'm not going to talk about the caravan," said Colonel Jansen, laughing. "Why! I believe you're more interested in it than in any plan of your own."

"Plan of my own? What do you mean?"

She sat down at a table, and pulled a shallow silver bowl towards her, then, picking up a bunch of violets that the mallie had sent in, began to arrange them in it.

"John, what do you mean?" she repeated anxiously, looking up at him. It might almost be said that there was a look of fear in her dark eyes.

"I have been wondering about the hot weather," he began. "Of course it's late to make a change of plan, but..."

"Isn't it to be the usual thing?" she asked sharply.

"It's to be just as you like, dear," he answered gently.

"But I have been thinking—that's all. If you wish it, I could manage a trip home for you to see the children."

“Wish it? Of course I do.”

“Then we must consider it. I ought to have done so before. I blame myself very much for not having done so. I think it was hearing a woman talk to-night about her children, at the Club, that opened my eyes to what you must be feeling.”

“Then you didn’t realise it before?” she asked slowly.

“Not quite what it must be like,” he answered with an effort. “But she put it very plainly—graphically. I saw it then. And also, you’re looking thin, as if a change out of the country would do you good.”

“Then it’s not the children you are thinking of?”

“It’s chiefly of you.”

“Of course I wish it. I long for it.”

She got up suddenly and went to the door, her long dress trailing after her, and stood looking out again into the darkness with a curious intensity. The band had stopped playing, the caravan had moved away down the high road, to its rest in the City, the lights of the village shone palely, and went out one by one.

Then she came back.

“John, how about you?”

“Me? Oh, I could run up to Murree when my leave comes. Don’t let that worry you. Don’t think of that.”

“But I do.”

“Well, you mustn’t.”

“What wife wouldn’t?”

“A dozen would be packing their boxes already. But that doesn’t matter. We must consider this if you are really going. My dear child, I didn’t know you wanted it so much.”

Mrs. Jansen did not look up. She fingered each violet daintily, thoughtfully, before she put it into its appointed place. Then she gathered together a large bunch, and tucked it into her wide waistband.

“How I should love it,” she murmured softly. “They

couldn't forget me. Your sisters promised they never should, but sisters-in-law are only human, and then . . ."

"Then it's settled?"

"John, when did you say you had long leave due to you?"

"Next year."

"Then I can't do it."

"What do you mean?"

"If we can both go home next year I shan't go home this."

"But it's quite easy."

"Don't force me, John. I can't leave you. We must go together or not at all. A change to some Hill Station, where you can join me, will set me up. It's no good—I can't do it."

"But what nonsense," he spoke indulgently. "You can travel with some one you know. There are several others going from here. You want it, Sybil—you've been out here too long."

"No, no—don't force me," her voice rose hysterically. "I can't leave you. Next year we'll go together—then there'll be no separation. Dear John, don't press me. I couldn't leave you—I really couldn't. Every moment I should be blaming myself. And what is one year more? We'll go home together next spring. In exchange you shall take me where I choose." She looked at him with a curious intentness.

"Don't I always?"

"Yes, yes. But you must promise."

"Well, you shall choose, if you don't go home."

"You are hurting me by urging it, John, you are indeed. You're paining me very much."

"I don't mean to do that, Sybil."

"But you are. Can't you see it? I can't bear to hear you, when I know what it means to you."

"My dear girl, I'm very sorry."

"Take me where I choose, and I'll—be quite satisfied." She looked up at him suddenly, and her lips began to quiver.

"We'll drop the subject if you feel like that about it. I didn't think, for an instant, the suggestion would affect you like this. Now don't work yourself up—it's all over and done with."

"Don't force me," she repeated hysterically. "I can't bear it. I really can't, John. You must see that."

"Yes, yes. My dear Sybil, it's all right. Don't distress yourself. There's nothing to look so scared about. If you really don't want to leave me—well you shan't. I suppose—I've blundered."

"Then we won't speak of it again. It's finished?"

"Yes, quite finished."

After he had left the room she remained sitting on the sofa staring after him. It was almost as though she expected him to return. She seemed like a woman who looks hungrily into the future, who endures the present, and lives on in a sort of expectation, feeding on a strange hope and certainty.

She wiped her forehead with her handkerchief, and moistened her lips. For the moment she had been very anxious. Then she smiled slowly and happily.

And the expression of her face was that of a woman who has experienced a great relief.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN a few days had passed, Jane awoke one morning to find that the mountain of worry she had accumulated grain by grain had disappeared. It had assumed such vast proportions as to block out the light, darken the sunshine. Now it had vanished with a completeness that amazed her. The sense of uneasiness had been lifted off her, leaving behind it a feeling of relief and repose.

She wondered as she looked into Daisy's happy eyes, and saw Harry's lover-like devotion, what she had found to distress herself about. Was it that two characters of utter dissimilarity had chosen each other with an instinctive regard for their own welfare? Had it lain in the fact that she herself was loath to part with the girl? She did not know. It belonged to that layer of unexplainable, intangible feeling that lies beneath our expressed wishes and desires, a region little known or recognised even by ourselves, a veritable no man's land that exists in each human consciousness.

Bob's repeated assurances of her fanciful tendencies struck her, at this point, as having a good deal of truth in them. Perhaps it was correct, as he had pointed out to her continually, that she was a nervous woman, given over to foolishness and vagaries, full of fancies and imagination. Possibly he had gauged her character with a certain astuteness. She admitted it with relief.

She had seen an enemy in every shadow, anticipated unhappiness, only to find herself entirely wrong. She had set up her own foolish opinion above the instincts of other people. She determined to be careful not to allow this to grow upon her. It might easily turn her into a censorious,

critical, apprehensive person. She felt thankful she had realised the fault.

Harry, now viewed in this way, seemed to her the very man for Daisy. She, with her gaiety and lightness of heart, the one who would be able to charm him out of his silence and gravity. They appeared to be fitted to each other, to be linked by the differences that had at first seemed so tremendous. Perhaps in making plans for others, Jane had overlooked the great fundamentals. She had forgotten that a woman is rarely attracted to a person like herself, and nearly always to the one who supplies the very thing she lacks.

In a week's time Mrs. Turner had become a very happy woman. She no longer had wakeful hours in the night, when she lay and turned things over. She was able even to listen to the flow of platitudes to which Emily Taylor gave tongue, with a tolerable show of patience and some secret amusement. She evidently had a poor opinion of any romance that she had not assisted, but an insatiable curiosity as to all its details. The question of the trousseau appeared to her paramount. She could not rest until the bridesmaids' dresses had been decided upon.

Jane was able to satisfy the stringent inquiries of the other mem-sahibs as to Harry's prospects. The marriage would not only not be imprudent, but desirable. He, like Daisy, had few near relations. An aunt in Southern India had written most kindly. A cousin in Pindi would probably appear at the wedding, to be his best man.

The other miss-sahibs in the cantonment eyed Daisy with a sort of wondering curiosity whenever she appeared. Their mothers unanimously assured Jane that, personally, they would never have allowed it had the lot fallen on one of their daughters, and when Harry's income became known, became positively vehement in denouncing it. No girl can know her mind at that age, they repeated with some asperity, and so Jane was content to leave it.

Mrs. Jansen seemed to regard Captain Oakes' engagement with a sort of tolerant amusement. She spoke kindly, almost warmly, of Daisy, but her words, or the subtle suggestion behind them, never failed to annoy Mrs. Turner. Her praise implied censure, criticism. Jane also noticed that she never failed to try and attract Harry's attention, renewed all her wiles to fix his eyes upon her, even for a minute. His engagement did not appear to put him beyond the range of her coquetries. She made continual efforts to place herself before his notice, even came to the bungalow on futile excuses. Sometimes she seemed almost unaware of the girl's existence, as oblivious of her as Harry was of her own presence. And Jane wondered at her blindness, or hardihood, whichever it might be.

The Turners had intended to spend their leave in Cashmere, and to take Daisy with them. Now the plan needed some revision. Harry started the idea—in which Mr. Turner supported him—for them to be married at the end of the cold weather in Sherpore, and spend their honeymoon camping up one of the valleys, then join forces with the Turners, till he had to rejoin his regiment.

Jane opposed the plan to begin with really more because she wished to hear the arguments in its favour than for any other reason. She felt now quite convinced that Daisy's happiness lay with Harry, that she was of the type which marries young and becomes moulded to the character of her husband. With a sort of feeble tenacity she tried to make them see the advantages of a Hill Station wedding, declared that no trousseau could be got together in the time, even if she engaged every dirzie in the bazaar.

"You must let them have their own way, Jenny," said Mr. Turner one evening. "It's no good holding out. Now don't get any more fancies. You see you were wrong all through."

"But the girl must have clothes, dear."

"There are dirzies," said Mr. Turner airily, "and back

verandahs for them to work on, and things to be copied, and shops in Calcutta."

Jane considered this, but it was the merest pretence. When Bob joined forces with the other two, she knew her resistance to be only fictitious.

"If you'd have followed my advice, you'd never have worried yourself about it," went on Mr. Turner. "Directly I told you what was going on, off you went at a tangent! It's a great lesson not to confide in one's wife, let me tell you. 'They're not suited—they're not suited.' I can hear you now. I had it the first thing in the morning, and every hour of the day! 'Pon my word, I wearied of the sound of your voice. I did indeed. Now you pretend to be pleased, and yet you try and delay the wedding. Now confess, Jenny, that you're a very trying woman."

So Daisy's wedding day was fixed.

After her husband had left the room Jane moved about restlessly. A little table near the door attracted her attention. Two of its legs of cross-grained wood were slightly warped, the third stood firm and sure. When she touched it, it shifted uneasily.

She took a few dead flowers out of the vases, flicked some dust off a chair, and readjusted a photograph.

Then she returned to the little table by the door. . . .

"One sound leg and—two warped ones," she murmured thoughtfully. "Can it stand? No, never. At the first touch it will collapse. It hasn't a chance. . . . I will move away this vase. . . ."

All day the remembrance recurred to her persistently. . . .

CHAPTER XV

It was a day of burning blue and golden sunshine. The sun poured down upon the cantonment striking a dazzling glare from the bungalow walls, turning the parade grounds into a desert, causing the plain itself to shimmer with heat.

An advance guard of women had already left for the Hills at the first bite of the mosquito. The rest of them would move up when Sherpore became intolerable. It was only a strong sense of duty, as they assured their husbands, that had detained them there so long.

At the Club the bar had taken up its hot-weather position under the trees in front of the building, and round it in the evening a group of men collected to discuss the day's work and prospects of leave. The few mem-sahibs who remained, listlessly turned over the pages of the illustrated papers in the reading-room, and counted the days till their own departure, while they assured their companions that this was not heat at all—a mere nothing to what was to follow.

Outside the City the orange groves were heavy with scent. In all the bungalow gardens the jasmine bushes showed stars of white, the bougainvillea made vivid blots of colour against the sky. The brain-fever bird had awakened to activity, and began to practise his notes with wearying persistency.

One could not see the pass in the hills now, nor the tomb of the saint which lay at their feet. A haze of heat shrouded the distances like a veil from which they emerged in the evening when the air cooled, and the sun sank behind the western peaks.

The pink bungalow had been in a mild state of ferment

since early morning. It had not witnessed a wedding since the daughter of Jane's predecessor had stepped out of it a happy bride on her father's arm, into the sunshine of the compound.

The rows of flowerpots and palms on the verandah had mysteriously increased in number. The mallie alone knew their origin and source, and Jane discreetly forbore to question him. Great bowls of violets from the gardens and roses from the hedges were on all sides, a large vase of stocks filled the drawing-room with fragrance.

Tinker, the brown spaniel, labouring under a large white satin rosette and an overwhelming sense of self-consciousness, tried to rub the former off on a chair leg, but finding it hopeless retreated to a corner in the compound where the presence of strange khitmutghars and unknown bearers perplexed his soul.

Mr. Turner, who could not be induced to look upon himself as one whit less important to the ceremony than the bride herself, spent the morning arranging and rearranging the presents, calling for Jane, stumbling over lines of chairs that seemed to have been placed there for his special undoing, and sending messages to Daisy that if she was not ready he would most certainly start without her. Then finding time hung a little heavily during the later hours of the morning he dropped off into a gentle doze on the verandah, only to be awakened by an anxious bearer with the intelligence that the mem-sahib was about to start.

Mrs. Taylor had found pretexts sufficient to enable her to come across three times before it was time to dress, just to see how things were going, but was relentlessly met and turned back by Mr. Turner himself before she could penetrate to the bungalow itself.

It was to be a white wedding ; Jane had insisted upon it. The duck uniforms of the men, the bride and her two bridesmaids, the guests who had been asked to carry white bouquets would give a look of coolness and freshness. The

scarlet-coated chuprassies, the syces in their different liveries would give a note of colour, and all around them lay the golden sunshine of India, striking a glint here and there from the helmet-spikes, glancing over the sword-hilts, just touching the scarlet and gold till they shone again.

The little bride looked hardly more than a child as she passed up the church on Mr. Turner's arm. Her simple dress made in the verandah under Jane's directions, her wreath of real orange blossoms, her floating veil, her little silver shoes presented as fair a sight as could be seen. As she went out to the strains of the Wedding March, beneath the crossed swords of her husband's brother officers, into the brilliant sunshine of the compound she looked as happy as the bride should, on whom the sun shines kindly.

So Daisy Temple married Harry Oakes in the little cantonment church at Sherpore.

"What a solemn occasion a wedding is," said Mrs. Taylor, "I feel it every time—and I generally say so. It is right to look on the serious side of things."

Jane sighed with relief. It was the happiness of a woman who recognises a friend among a host of strangers. It could hardly be that Emily should fail to supply the platitude. It was nice to find that Emily was Emily still.

"I often think that if we could look ahead we should not regard it as a festivity," she went on gloomily, looking round at the guests in the Turners' compound.

"If I could have looked ahead I should hardly have believed what I saw," said Jane softly.

"You mean you have been happy? Well, I am sure I am very glad to hear it. But then Mr. Turner is just that sort of man. So well meaning I always call him," went on Mrs. Taylor, as one who bestows rare but well-merited praise. "Steady—very steady."

She caught sight of the bridesmaids, and started on a fresh train of thought.

"I really believe one wedding leads to another, don't you, Jane? Now just look at the way Colonel Walters is gazing at the pretty Hobson girl. Very marked, I call it. When I was a girl, I should have expected something to happen—I should indeed. You see the idea of weddings has been before his mind."

"A case of suggestion?"

"That's it, suggestion. But I am getting fanciful. My imagination is always at work. But a wedding is a solemn occasion, one must not forget that. I say, Jane."

"Yes, dear?"

"How do you like my dress?"

"Very much indeed, but surely——"

"Yes, you have seen it before. *Quite* between ourselves. Don't you remember? At the dance of the 19th. It has been filled in by Nathia Ram. 'Paris again?' Mrs. Jacobs said when she saw it. I must say I thought it was very well put. Now I must move on and talk to Major Talbot. I want to tell him that the Larcombe girl has been asking after him. I always believe in giving a helping hand. You are not the *only* chaperon you see, Jane."

Mrs. Jansen came to the wedding, perhaps because her absence would have caused remark. She appeared as pretty as usual, talked a great deal, laughed incessantly, moved about among the people collected on the lawn as though she could hardly remain in one place. Harry appeared unconscious of her existence, Daisy talked to her a little in her gentle way, Mr. Turner explained to her his infinite capacity as a match-maker. Jane was struck anew by a sort of inappropriateness about her. Although her soft white dress, flower-wreathed hat, and lace parasol made a charming effect, the groups of people seemed to make her look incongruous. The shamiana, the khitmutghars, the bridesmaids, the best man did not seem her right setting. Among the conventional people around her she seemed a little out of the picture.

Presently Mr. Turner made a speech, but his wife told him afterwards that it only confirmed her in the belief that silence is golden. In many long-winded and obscure sentences, he took upon himself entire responsibility for the happy event they were celebrating to-day, confessed, on being pressed, that he had foreseen it from the first, had laboured long and earnestly to smooth the course of true love.

“Good-bye, my dear child. We shall meet again soon,” said Jane tenderly, as Daisy took leave of her.

“Never forget that you owe it all to me,” called out Mr. Turner.

“Weddings are sad, sad things,” added Mrs. Taylor.

PART II

CHAPTER I

Who has ever driven into Cashmere, up the course of its river, mounted the lonely reaches of the road, watched the night creeping up behind the hills, seen the snow-capped mountains far away on the horizon, without that strange uplifting of the spirit, which comes to us all at the sight of nature beautiful, triumphant?

As Jane Turner drove up the gorge of the Jhelum, in the open tonga with her husband, there came to her that strange sensation of passing into a new world. She felt, instinctively, that it did not lie only in the change of locality, in the shifting of the body, but was more akin to the feeling of one who steps on to a new plane of existence, a sharpening of faculties hitherto unknown, a step forward into a world of acuter perception.

The rugged cliffs through which the river churned its way, the squalid Cashmeri villages which clung to its banks, the occasional strips of cultivation on the level ground, the nightly halts in the dâk bungalows, all seemed to her parts of a new phase of life, the experiences of one who has become conscious of something beyond and above the routine of life.

The remembrance of Sherpore, which they had left a month ago—spending some time in Murree on the way up—now seemed remote and distant, belonging to some previous incarnation. She remembered that at such and such a time she had been ordering dinner, bartering with the khansamah, directing the dirzie, driving to the Club.

Then she had written mail letters on a fixed day to the same people, her boy, the sisters, her mother, filling them up with the little happenings of station life. The rising of bazaar prices had taken half a page, the party given by the wife of the General, Bob's tour in the district, the regiments that were under orders to come to the station, had all seemed of infinite importance. But it had been routine—she saw that now—her groove had been wearing steadily deeper, her interests had shrunk because she had made very little effort to extend them. She had become absorbed in the trivialities of existence, and—greatest mistake of all—had forgotten that they were trivialities. A perception of the width and breadth of Life began to steal over her, a sense—dim and uncertain at first—of the limitless vistas and stretches of experience, came to her. She knew that in some intangible way she was not the same woman who had stayed in the hotel at Murree, that some change had begun in her when they passed Kohala, which was surely progressing. She wondered vaguely if it was at work in Bob also, and turned to look at him as he sat by her side in the tonga. There he was, with his topee pulled down over his eyes, his rough suit covered with white dust, holding Tinker in his arms that he might not feel the jolting of the road, as typical a sight of a middle-aged man on leave as one could wish to see.

Day by day they drove farther into the country which has always been the holiday resort of the Indian official and the globe-trotter, along the road over which so many wayfarers have passed, driving stage by stage, till the navigable part of the Jhelum is reached. That road has seen many travellers; lovers, honeymooners, explorers bound for the uplands beyond the mountains, hunters in search of to bear, markhor, ibex, men on leave who only wish to get some green spot, keen golfers bound for Gulmurg, mem-sahibs wearied with the heat of India, miss-sahibs full of expectation. Up and up the road they pass, spend

the nights in the dâk bungalows, read in the guest-book the names of those who have already gone that way, jot down a complaint or two if they feel so disposed, about the service, the cooking, distribute a few tips, see the luggage packed into the tonga, then press on another stage. At last they board their house-boat, or dunga, at Baramulla, and are towed gently up to Srinagar, the city of bridges and waterways, box-wallahs and atrocious smells.

One night when the ekkas in which their luggage was travelling failed to arrive, although in India the incident would have upset Jane strangely, now it affected her not a jot. The spirit of adventure made it appear unimportant, trivial. Who could worry about the non-appearance of a blanket, when they could watch that one particularly bright star which hung over the edge of the mountain, and the glitter of the moonlight on the river? The yelping of the pariah dogs far away in the village, the tinkle of the goat-bell, the dashing of the water against the stones, were the things that mattered, the realities of the moment. If the dâk bungalow khansamah, an evil-looking fellow of villainous appearance, could only provide a fowl of doubtful age, and a custard pudding of a characterless and insipid description, was it not a delightful contrast from her own well cooked, carefully ordered dinners in Sherpore? They had been famous—and rightly so—among diners-out in the cantonment. Now she wondered how she had ever been bothered to write out the menu, and discuss each item with such deliberation.

One day, when they had made an early start to cover a long stage to the next dâk bungalow before nightfall, they came upon a piece of the road under repair. A white-topeed sahib with many coolies was in charge of the work, and he hailed Mr. Turner as an old friend. While they stood talking, Jane got down from the tonga, and sauntered up the slope of the road. It wound up past a bunniah's hut and a scattered village, in dazzling, sun-baked stretches, to a

point from which it gently declined again. A mountain stream of icy coldness dashed down from the heights, and trickled across the road. Great clusters of fern clung to the rocks; a few goats clambered over the tracks with tinkling bells.

At the top Jane paused suddenly, and stood looking before her, silent, amazed. Her husband's servant, who had followed her, drew back into the shade, and wondered what had come to the mem-sahib, that she stood as if turned to stone. Tinker flung himself down by her side, and waited till she should move on again.

In that moment she had caught sight of the snows, the giants that uphold the earth, the ramparts of civilisation, the belt of mountains that with white-tipped crests look down upon the wayfarers into Cashmere. She had come suddenly upon the sight that, above all others, makes us silent and still before it.

Far away they hung, a fairy range on the horizon, half veiled by the mists which floated round them, cutting into the blue of the sky with sharp, delicate outlines; the most entrancing, elusive, mysterious sight in all creation.

How is it that the appearance of a mountain holds some special spell that can move the most torpid imagination? There are people whom a beech-wood, the sound of the wind in the copse of young larches, the glow of gorse on the common, leaves quite unmoved. They see no special beauty in the whiteness of the lilac, the tiny stars of the jasmine. The whole book of nature fails to give them pause. But show them a mountain. . . . Lead them up some winding ascent to a place where :

“Shadowy-petalled, like the lotus, loom the mountains with their
snows,”

and you will find them transfixed, humbled, silent before this greatest mystery of all.

At some time or another we have all recognised this

love of mountains as a thing apart, something unaccountable which appears, we know not why, in some commonplace nature which does not stir at the sight of beauty. We may have come across it in one by whose side we have walked some way along the road of life, and have felt amazed when we see the passion it arouses. But what is this to the shock of finding it in yourself, powerful, absorbing, and unsuspected? Is not this the greatest surprise of all?

Jane was not a very receptive woman. She never could understand the passionate love which some people feel for nature. She had always looked upon it as a little overwrought, a trifle foolish perhaps, in some cases a not very attractive pose which some thought fit to assume. But in this moment she caught some dim reflection of it, she felt a faint stirring of sympathy with all beauty lovers, a comprehension of something which, hitherto, had been beyond her ken.

In later years she looked back to this first sight, as to a starting-point, perhaps of suffering, of faculties sharpened, intensified, of clearer vision. If she had not gazed upon those mountains with just that throb of joy, the events of the next month might have passed her by without the understanding which afterwards became hers. For in that moment, she took a step forward into a country through which she was to journey painfully; stumbling unknowingly, nearer to a time in her existence that was to prove itself unforgettable; the ineffaceable, which was going to cut her off from the normal and prosaic, and write itself indelibly across the even story of her life.

CHAPTER II

ON the shores of the Dhal Lake the Turners pitched their summer camp. There, with the mountains looking down unceasingly into its calm surface—as though they could never bear to contemplate any other thing—it lay, surrounded by its weeds and water-lilies, its rustling poplar groves, and its clumps of mulberry trees standing in the springing corn.

Mr. Turner came out one afternoon from Srinagar and chose it. He had been rowed about all through the long, hot afternoon. The awning of his shikara had only tempered the rays of the sun. He had not seen any special tying-up place that tempted his fancy till he had come to it; but an instant had decided it. So, in a moment of time, he had chosen the spot that Jane was never again able to wipe from the tablet of her mind.

Near a grove of chenar trees, which led down to the water's edge, through which the sun flickered fitfully, Mr. Turner decreed that the tents should be pitched. A little creek ran inland, in which they moored their boat; the dunga on which they had come from Srinagar lay just above. The bearer and khitmutghar flitted about the camp, seeing the tents were properly boarded under foot, and securely pitched, that nothing should collapse if a storm should pass over the water. Bob sat in a deck-chair and gave directions, then walked about restlessly giving orders, which he immediately contradicted, confused the boatmen, upset the arrangements, then went off for a stroll, telling his wife that she really must see about something herself, and not leave everything in the hands of the servants.

When left to herself, Jane made an inspection of the camping ground which Bob had selected, and she could not but admit to herself that he had chosen well. Although she would not have admitted it to him, she knew she could have done no better herself.

The group of chenar trees made a delightful shade. Underneath them, already, the bearer had put out the dining-table, and one or two easy chairs. Their sleeping-tents were a little to the rear—small but comfortable. A rather larger living-tent made up the camp. The servants' cook-house, cleverly put against a tree, was out of sight.

That first impression of the Lake that Jane received, always remained with her. Sitting beneath the cool shade of the trees, as she looked out into the heavy afternoon sunshine, she felt a sensation of languor, as delicious as it was strange. She had no wish to overtake Bob, as he had hinted she might do later, if so disposed, but lay back in her chair and watched the changing colours in the Lake, the shadows on the hills, the far-away distances wrapped in heat and mist. To her, fresh from three weeks in an hotel in Murree, and four days in another at Srinagar, it seemed a lovely spot, the very place in which to dream away happy hours—its very loneliness making it desirable. She had wondered if she would really enjoy camp life, if she was not too gregarious a woman to appreciate it. Now she had no doubts at all. It seemed the existence, above all others, for which she was most fitted, the one place in which she could rest and be content, and let the hours slip by in an unnoticed procession. The thought of a dinner-party, at that moment, seemed to her unendurable; but Bob and she, sitting at the table under the trees, with the bearer and khitmutghar coming backwards and forwards from the cook-house with dishes, their white coats glimmering in the dusk, the pale light of the lamp, the air teeming with humming things, the heavy scents around, all seemed part of a new,

delightful existence. Then, after dinner, she and Bob would sit out near the edge of the Lake, and hear the water lapping at the shores. They would watch the stars peep out above the hills, listen to the clamour in the village near by, till it gradually died away and ceased altogether, hear the myriad insects around them, the distant howling of the dogs, the nightly life of nature all around.

Yes—this was what she was made for—not for busy cantonments and big stations. How thankful she was that Bob had not allowed himself to be over-persuaded, and allow her to go to Simla. The very thought now tired her, filled her with a sort of vicarious nausea. They might have gone—and would have if she had had her way—and she would have missed this, and all the weeks that were to come.

As the days passed, Jane's content deepened. She went about her simple housekeeping, drifted through the hours, wandered about under the chenars, or through the grove of poplars at the back, bought mulberries and country produce from the villagers, rowed about on the Lake with a happiness that increased. Every detail of their life seemed of interest. She could not imagine herself ever tiring of it. Every hour of the day the aspect of the Lake seemed to alter mysteriously, to put on fresh shades of colour, to soften, to melt into different tones, change suddenly into something undreamed of before, show a side of itself which it had hitherto guarded carefully. Sometimes great purple shadows seemed to lie upon it, as clouds drifted over; at others it seemed to sparkle with a hardness that was almost cruel, to reflect the trees and village in itself, with a terrible clearness, to throw back the colours around it almost too truthfully.

Sometimes in the evening Jane would wander a little way along the shore, to where an old walnut tree stood. From here she could see the old palace of the Mogul sovereigns, the sport of emperors, the plaything of their

leisure hours. It had been the summer garden, to which they had fled from the hot, sun-baked plains of India, a lovely spot of running fountains, shady trees, and marble tanks.

For hundreds of years it had stood, looking out over the Lake, watching the holiday-makers who came streaming into Cashmere, and turned aside just to give it a glance. It was like a cynic of the ages, worldly wise in the ways of men, a monument to the golden hours of the past.

There was a sadness about that garden house Jane thought as she looked at it. Its fountains, its fretted balconies, its terraced walks, its marigold-strewn paths, all spoke of how much it had been loved. Now it seemed so unutterably empty, a plaything with which no one cared to play, only a sight at which the globe-trotter could wonder. Those paths, along which lovely women with tinkling anklets had passed, were overgrown and moss-covered; no dark eyes now ever looked out from behind the trellises, no light-footed girl ever danced upon the marble floor. The chatter of voices never came from the women's quarters, or echoed in the palace, no one ever watched for the first appearing of the tiny stars of jasmine, or listened for the notes of the bulbul in the thickets. A mallie flitted about, like the spirit of the gardens, and Jane would watch him dawdling through the long, hot hours, lying on the grass with his hookah, in the shade of the trees, or squatting on the landing steps by the Lake, chattering with the boatmen who brought the picnic-parties out from Srinagar. Sometimes he raised a queer little song, which floated across the water like the first faint notes of a bird, with trills and turns, strange cadences, sudden silences. These little snatches fascinated Jane—why she did not know. She did not care very much about music, but the mallie's song seemed a part of the place itself. She had heard natives sing before, shuffling along in the dust in Sherpore, driving to some tomasha in the City in rickety ekkas, wandering about some garden outside

the station, but never before had a song touched her in just the way this Cashmeri gardener's did.

It belonged, in some indefinable sense, to the strange world she had entered. It voiced—so she put it to herself—the queer feeling of detachment she had, the separation from the things of civilisation that had first struck her in the camp on the Dhal.

When he was not singing he would watch the rose-petals falling, one by one, on the grass, stirred gently by the breeze from the Lake, fluttering down till they lay among the water-lilies. Sometimes he would turn on the runnels of water, and it gurgled and splashed in the fountains, fell into the sunk tanks, stirring the water-lilies till they rocked gently to and fro. Then he would drift away, and Jane would watch in vain for him, long for the sound of his little song, his shuffling step, for the sight of the rose tucked into his turban.

"It's the very home of romance," she would murmur softly. "How pitiable we must all seem to them if they knew. The people who've lived here knew how to get every atom of pleasure from each moment, to make lovely places, exquisite gardens, to enjoy it all. And the spirit of pleasure lies over the place still—even the mallie shows it."

"Bob, this is beautiful," she said one evening to her husband. "I love this place. Why did you never bring me here before? Another year, if I have anything to say to it . . ."

"You liked Murree well enough when you were there, and the Galis. I never remember hearing you grumble. And—please correct me if I am wrong—did I not hear something said about Simla this year?"

"There, there, how you do go on! I admit—yes, I admit that I wished it. But do allow the subject to rest. Don't wear it to bits. I am frightened when you get hold of a new joke—I am indeed. It means I am treated to it to weariness."

Mr. Turner laughed good-humouredly.

“Very well, Jane—just as you like. But it seems I have done something right, after all, in bringing you here. Well, it is just as well to make a beginning.”

“I don’t think I shall ever get tired of watching the lights on the hills. Just look across to that spur. Every hour of the day they are different. And was there ever anything so wild as the cry of the boatmen as they change stroke?”

Bob grunted. He was well pleased. The camp in the shade of the chenars suited him very well indeed. He was glad Jane liked it too. At least he supposed he was glad. He usually was when anything made her happy. Anyway, nothing seemed to matter much, except the delicious feeling of drowsiness which was coming over him, and the sense of satisfaction which enveloped him. It certainly did not come from watching the lights on the sides of the hills, as Jane said it did, that much he did know. He rather thought it might be because there was no work for him to do to-morrow nor the day after, nor any day that he need bother about. He realised that some time in the future he must take it up again, but all that looked vague and dim. He knew now that if Jane hadn’t liked it he would not have budged—that much he was certain of. He suddenly dropped the chain of introspection, and shifted himself in his chair.

Very soon his wife’s voice began again :

“Look at that woman paddling her way through the floating gardens. She is bringing home fodder for the cattle, which she has got from the Lake ! She has shot into that little creek above the village.”

Bob wished that she would not talk, but he did not like to hurt her feelings, so he roused himself to take an interest in the woman with the fodder. He did not feel the slightest, but he grunted out something about its being a pretty sight, and one they would see very often.

“Did you have a bad night ? ” asked Jane gently.

"No—no. Not at all. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I was only wondering. You seem so sleepy. D'ye know, Bob, I can't tell you how I am looking forward to Daisy and Harry joining us here. It's wonderful how much I and that child have in common.. She will love this life, and I have a thousand things to tell her. She's such a *companion*. I know no one I'd rather be with, and that's saying a lot, and . . ."

"Jane."

"Yes, Bob. How you startled me! And must you shout when I am not two feet away?"

"I'm sure I'm very sorry. I beg your pardon, my dear. But I just remembered something I must tell you. It came back to me quite suddenly. I had to get it off at once."

"Well, I am listening."

"This evening I went for a stroll, right along the bank to where you see that mulberry tree. A camp has been pitched just across there, on that little beach. There's a cluster of tents and a couple of ponies, and one of the nicest houseboats I've seen for a long time. I walked right into the middle of it—I was quite upset."

"Well, what of that? Have you monopolised every camping ground round the Lake? Didn't you expect other people would care to come here too?"

"Now, Jane, don't take me up like that. I feel a bit stupid this evening—and fogged. That's it—fogged. I suppose I tell a story badly, but I must do it my own way."

"Poor Bob—do let me hear the end."

"It's the Jansens' camp, Jane. They're here just beside us."

"Well, Bob, it doesn't appear to me very dreadful," said Jane calmly. "Why not the Jansens, pray?"

"Oh, I only thought. . . . No, nothing, but Daisy and Harry—I don't know quite why, but somehow I wish it

wasn't them, Jane. I wish it was anybody but them—coming and settling down in front of our door like this. I'm getting foolish, I suppose."

"Well, you must get wise then," answered Jane tartly.

As she got up and went away to dress for dinner, she knew that she felt the same as her husband; that in her heart of hearts, underneath the nonchalance she chose to assume, that she wished it was anyone but the Jansens too.

CHAPTER III

I

At the end of the fifth day the Oakes arrived. They drove out from Srinagar in a tonga, and at the first sight of the coolies carrying their luggage, marshalled along by an officious and triumphant bearer, and the tops of their solar topees, Jane ran out to meet them.

She had been restless and unable to settle to anything all day, forgetful of her housekeeping duties, abstracted with her husband, neglectful even of the dogs, who made tentative efforts to engage her attention. She had had several letters from Daisy in the early days of her honeymoon, but she was a bald writer, unable to give any reflection of her feelings, one of those correspondents who only raise a feeling of irritation in the souls of those who write more readily. Her letters had been read and re-read, then laid aside with a sigh of impatience. The only things that could be learned from them had been a few facts of their whereabouts, her delight with Cashmere—expressed in a few curt sentences—and the date when they would join the Turners on the Dhal.

Jane spent a good deal of time in the morning in watching their tents being pitched, and arranging the camp-furniture in them. She had persuaded her husband—who was only too ready to fall in with the idea—to leave all this to her. She wondered the whole day how the place would strike them, and tried to recall her own first impressions. It already seemed to her a long time since they had left the hotel at Srinagar, and come out to camp on the shores of the Dhal.

She walked along the bank to where the walnut tree

stood, and considered the camp from a distance. It certainly looked very attractive, viewed from a little way off. Anyone would be hard to please who did not like the spreading chenars, the stretch of turf beneath them and the grove of poplars at the back.

Along a winding track which led through yellowing cornfields, a string of Cashmeri women were passing, chattering gaily, casting interested looks at Jane, calling to the children who strayed to the water's edge. Through a group of mulberry trees she could see their village, a squalid collection of mud-huts, near a creek which ran inland. Between the houses, sitting in the dust, some women were grinding corn. An outer circle of underfed, yelping dogs drove her away, and she strolled a little way along the path. A cloud was passing over the sun, and bringing a thousand deeper tints into the landscape. Across the Lake there lay purple shadows, turning the waters into homes of mystery and enchantment, shrouding the hills till they looked dark and threatening, lying over chenars and poplars, making their vistas dim and misty.

Then it passed and the sun shone out again suddenly. The brighter colours came back at its call, glanced over the waters, touched the crests of the hills, played over the reeds and irises like a magician's wand.

The glimmer of the Jansens' tents through the trees caught Jane's eye as she turned, and she put up her sun-umbrella with a resentful click, to shut it out, and started walking back towards her own camp.

"Yes, Daisy will love it. We shall be together again," she murmured softly. "I want the child so badly. I long to watch her happiness—see it for myself. What do I care who comes and camps next to us? It's as little to me as that straw floating on the water."

Oh, Jane, Jane, most truthful of mem-sahibs, why do you assure yourself of what you already know? Is it to still that little whisper of doubt that lurks in the very

background of your mind, to dispel that tiny cloud whose approach you dread so much? Have you too resorted to that oldest device of all to argue down your wandering thoughts, range your own brain against your instinct? Can it be that it still remains the most persistent and powerful of the two?

In the late afternoon they arrived. As they rounded the corner in the jolting tonga, and pulled up with a jerk which nearly dislodged the occupants, Jane had time to notice with amazement that Harry was positively waving to her. Daisy, who looked very small and white under a large sun-hat, appeared from the back.

Mr. Turner, who was, of course, not on the spot, but hurrying up anxiously from somewhere in the background—his watch was either very much too fast, or very much too slow—signalled wildly to Jane to hurry, and called out his welcome. Tinker, whose ambition had long since declared itself to be that of a comic character, but who could only achieve a heavy, middle-aged form of humour, wearisome to the beholder, went to meet them with playful twistings and turnings of his brown person, sudden halts, swift onrushes. He then made an unconvincing feint at non-recognition, stood like a coy child, advanced slowly, with deliberation and an affectation of coldness that would have wrung the coldest heart.

"Oh, Jane, at last! I feel jolted in every bone—just as if every one of them needed resetting."

"That is a feeling peculiar to the country."

"But I wouldn't have missed it for the world! Cashmere's certainly the country for a honeymoon. The vineyards and the fields, and, above all, the mountains. And now this lovely place that you have chosen."

"I chose it," interrupted Mr. Turner hastily. "Jane would never have noticed it. I came out from Srinagar, and spotted it at once. I'm an old camper, Daisy."

"So I see. Well, you couldn't have chosen better. So green and cool and still, and far away from everyone else."

“Yes, far away from everyone else,” put in Jane casually. “And, oh yes, did we tell you? The Jansens have pitched a camp just up the bend.”

“No—really? How funny,” said Daisy without interest. “Oh, Jane, you would have laughed if you could have seen us sometimes. We’ve done everything that globe-trotters should do. Not that I consider myself one now, as my husband’s life will be spent in the country.”

“We’ve fed sacred fishes, we’ve been carried across rivers, we’ve ridden on what the bearer describes as ‘black men’s saddles,’” said Harry, laughing. “We’ve studied the character of the coolie till we know him inside out.”

“But we find ourselves easier to understand after all. And we trust no man, after engaging a so-called English-speaking bearer. Such struggles, Jane, I’ve had, with his ten words of English and my fifteen of Hindustani. Now we’ve reached a sort of compromise, in which signs bear a large part.”

“And now I suppose you are going to write a book about it,” said Mr. Turner pleasantly. “After the fashion of women who have completed their third month in the East.”

“And show you the depth of human ignorance? No, Mr. Turner, I shall not gratify you so far.”

“No, only confirm my conviction of human folly. What, no book? Well, this is something new.”

“I have been led to suppose myself a very superior and exceptional person,” said Daisy, laughing, “and now I find I have dropped far below the average again. I think you are very good for the growth of the character, Mr. Turner.”

When the Oakes had gone off to their tent, Jane sat on with her husband under the trees while he finished his pipe.

“Good thing there was one sensible person about when those two fell in love,” he remarked after a pause. Jane

knew that the pleasing reference was to himself, and that, inwardly, he was commenting adversely upon her conduct. It did not disturb her.

"Yes, dear," she assented meekly.

"If I hadn't been round they'd have lost happiness," he continued, with a sort of self-satisfied air. "You're all right, my dear, when there's somebody to *guide* you. You mean well, but sometimes you're a bit off the track. I saw at once that they fitted in. It struck me as desirable directly I realised how the land lay. And when I think how you put yourself out about it! Poor old Jenny—but I'll not throw it up at you. No, no—we all make mistakes sometimes. But I know how to forget. It makes me laugh when I think about it! Over and over again, the same parrot cry: 'They're not suited,' when all the world could see. . . . But you may depend that I shall not reopen the subject again."

"Thank you, dear. That's very good of you," she answered gratefully.

II

After tea Daisy unpacked. She had brought very few things with her, and these she disposed of quickly and methodically. It didn't seem to matter if the tent-pole got a good deal in her way, and that the small looking-glass would not give as much of her face as was desirable. She was so very happy—too happy to mind occasional bumps and cramped quarters. The bearer had brought in a lamp and put it on a small table. Through the tent door she could see the stars coming out one by one. Along the track at the back some villagers were tramping, and singing softly. She could have sung too. She could have joined in the song of the chenars, and the water, and the poplars, indeed she was humming gaily when her husband came and stood silhouetted against the light, and looked down upon her gravely.

“ Harry, isn’t this lovely ? ”

“ Yes—quite lovely.”

She slipped her hand into his.

“ Have you seen the shikara Mr. Turner has got for us ? He and Jane have one of their own. This one is for us.”

“ He showed it to me.”

“ We can row about on the Lake just as we please. And then the camp itself. I love it—it’s cool and green and shady. One feels at rest here. No longer wanderers.”

“ Yes, it’s all that.”

“ I shall enjoy not moving on for a little ; making this place our home for a time.”

“ Poor child, you were tired. But it’s all you say—and more.”

Behind his tone of acquiescence she detected the faintest shade of dissatisfaction.

“ You don’t altogether like it ? There’s something you’d rather was different ? Tell me, Harry. I want to understand every thought in your mind.”

He did not speak for a moment, and she leant her head against him and waited.

“ I wanted the other to go on—and on,” he said, after a pause.

“ You mean our wandering about the valleys alone ? ”

“ Yes—alone. I wanted it to last.”

“ It’s going to last,” she said softly. “ The thing that made us glad to be alone, I mean. For it’s all the same, Harry, if you’re with people or not. The happiness is going to last, dear.”

“ Of course it couldn’t be different. But I’ve got to share you.”

“ Only with two people. Think of the parents and aunts and cousins a bride generally carries along with her ! Not to mention a favourite sister, and a school friend. If the Turners are entitled to a little—a very little—do you grudge it, Harry ? ”

"Yes, I think I do."

She loved him the more for it. As she looked up into his handsome dark face, and held his hand in hers, she knew that his jealous absorption in her rather added to his attraction. And as she gazed past him into the shadows of the camp, she rejoiced that her life would consist in making this man happy, that she could give so much, that it was for her to fill his cup of happiness to the brim.

"If you feel like this we can be off again," she answered softly. "Let us take a house-boat or a dunga and go up the river by ourselves. We will stay here a week or two to please Jane. But, Harry, you will like it when you see what an unselfish person she is, and how little of my society contents her."

She looked at him lovingly, wistfully, and he replied passionately that he only wanted to be with her, could put up with anything and anybody if he only had that, would never make the least suggestion that distressed her.

"But I love you for it," she said gently. "I love you the more for it. I want to know everything that passes through your mind. Promise me this, Harry."

"Of any sort?" he asked tenderly.

"Yes—of any sort. We can't be happy unless we have that—or I can't."

"How excited you are!"

"Promise me, Harry. I mean it."

So he promised as the stars looked down upon them, as the shadows closed around, as darkness fell upon the camp.

As the days passed, Jane's happiness increased. It was true, as Bob had said, that the Oakes fitted in. Perhaps when nature gives to one person a little more, to another a little less, she has a plan in view. She only knows how to adjust the scales, to follow the law of justice she has evolved. Perhaps she means to atone for her partiality by uniting two persons, making them one so that they can share her

gifts. When Daisy, a creature of sun and joy, crossed Harry's path, lightening his sombre spirit as a torch does a dark place, perhaps she had this recompense in view. Certainly no one else could have been so fitted to lift him out of his taciturnity.

Although Mr. Turner petulantly declared that, as host, he was entitled to a good deal of Daisy's society, and she good-naturedly gave it, Jane was aware that with her it was only marking time. All the hours spent away from Harry were to her as lost. She not only loved her grave, taciturn husband, but he interested her. He had for her the attraction that impenetrability always has for the light things of this earth. Mystery, that most alluring of all voices, called her to him. The girl whom a score of men might have failed to arouse, was fascinated by a man who sat silent for hours, lost in abstraction, whose eye only lighted when she came by. She was learning, day by day, what Jane always described as the axiom of married life—adaptability. Insensibly she was moulding her character to her husband's. Even if Harry could have learnt every art that the poets could have taught him, had mastered the way to flatter, and turn sentences, it is doubtful if he would have held his light-hearted little wife in so firm a hold.

The day after their arrival, Mr. Turner gravely assured them that their honeymoon was now at an end. He had no intention of absenting himself when he desired to be present, or behaving in the way he had during their engagement. There were one or two things he would like them to understand, which he had already—at some length—made plain to the understanding of Jane.

Now they had come to the Dhal, they must throw aside all Western activity, and learn to cultivate the calm of the East. He had no notion of having the place upset by a pair of restless sightseers. As they had come to stay in the camp under the chenars they must conform to its rules. What were they? inquired Daisy with an appearance of interest.

Rest, he responded without hesitation. He would have no cut-and-dried programmes arranged. As far as possible, time was to be forgotten. He did not wish to see a calendar. He had no desire to hear of any plan that entailed an effort.

His wishes should be respected, Daisy assented gravely. She and Harry were quite prepared to conform to them. They had no intention of imparting an atmosphere redolent of Clapham Junction, of restless hurry and movement to the place. If they would be allowed sometimes to go for a little walk by themselves, or to take the shikara and row about on the water, their desire for action would be appeased.

Thus reassured, Mr. Turner allowed his harassed soul to rest, and began to propound a plan to Harry of a trip up the river to Islamabad.

The next day Harry had one of his silent fits, and Mr. Turner laughingly commented upon it, and told Daisy he should carry him off for a tramp. When the tall, high-shouldered form walking beside the shorter, sturdier one had disappeared in the distance, the two women went for a stroll in the opposite direction.

"That's Harry all over," said Daisy gravely, when they had been walking a little; "Mr. Turner doesn't understand."

"You mean . . . ?"

"I don't think I should have cared about an ordinary sort of man," she went on softly. "Not for any length of time, I mean. I am not setting myself up as an extraordinary woman, or one that must have the very best. But that's just what attracts me in Harry—the very thing that Mr. Turner remarks upon, binds me to him. He seems to stand out alone—he is governed by his moods. In anyone else I should hate it. Who else would sit through a day in silence just because he had nothing to say? I suppose it is because I'm such a conventional creature that the touch of the primitive fascinates me. It's just him—you see it, don't you, Jane?"

"My dear, I have always felt it."

“By the side of Harry’s silence, Mr. Dacre’s conversation was infinitely tedious.”

“Even his admiration did not weigh down the scale?”

“I was hardly conscious of it, except that it might add to me in Harry’s eyes.”

“What an egotist! But you are all the same. Young married people are the poorest company in all the world.”

“You must own that the other period is worse,” said Daisy, smiling.

“The time of indecision? Oh yes,” answered Jane with feeling. “But what will you be saying when the time comes to return to Sherpore?”

“When . . . I . . . return . . . to . . . Sherpore,” echoed Daisy wonderingly. “When I return . . .”

“Why of course. Don’t you mean to go back?” asked Jane, laughing.

“When . . . I . . . return,” she repeated again, vaguely. Then: “Oh! isn’t that the mallie singing? Surely, Jane, it must be his voice. How strange it sounds—how very strange it sounds.”

They both stopped to listen as the thin, bird-like notes floated across the water, then died away in the distance.

“Let us go in. It is very cold.”

Somehow they could not pick up the interrupted conversation again.

CHAPTER IV

"HADN'T we better all go across and see the Jansens sometime?" asked Mr. Turner one day after tiffin, when they were having coffee under the chenars.

Jane did not take to the idea at all—in fact it struck her as a particularly unpleasant one. She somehow did not want the meeting to take place between Harry and Mrs. Jansen so soon. She could not define it, but she had a vague sort of feeling that she would have wished his marriage to become more established first. On the other hand, she felt it would be very nice for Mrs. Jansen to see Harry looking at his wife in just the way he was doing then. He was watching her catch a stray tendril of hair and imprison it under her hat brim, with an absorbed attention. Yes—it would be very nice for her to see that look of devotion. It would please Jane to know that the woman who had caused her anxiety should see the sympathy between the two.

"It's too hot for walking," she said at last in a tone of finality.

"Why I could throw a stone into their camp."

"They ought to have come to see me. You are senior to Colonel Jansen."

"They're not supposed to know we are here."

"Is anything unknown where there are native servants?" asked Harry.

"This isn't Sherpore, now is it?" said Daisy lightly.

"I can't really see that seniority very much matters. Let us stroll across about tea-time. I feel interested in that camp—I do indeed."

"Come, Jane, you're one against the world."

"Well, if you all wish it, we will go—only it does seem

a little foolish to me, to come to a place like this for quiet, and then to rush—yes, literally to rush—at the first people you know. You could see each other every day in Sherpore if you wanted it.”

Bob laughed easily.

“But it isn’t Sherpore, as Daisy says. And I feel I shall like the Jansens better up here. We will go and see if they think the same about us. Anyway, she couldn’t like me less than she used to do,” he chuckled happily.

“What have you done to annoy her?” asked Harry—but without much interest.

“Nothing, except exist,” said Jane. “But she doesn’t care much about us. In fact, in Sherpore, I never could quite make out who her friends were. Those excitable women do not seem to me to have much grip. She never struck me as sure of herself, always trying to create an effect—what I call a poser. . . .”

She stopped suddenly. No one seemed to be listening, or in the least interested in the subject. Her husband had fallen into a doze; Harry and Daisy were exchanging glances. She relapsed into silence, and watched a boat push out from the shore and glide swiftly over the Lake; while the shadows lengthened slowly, and little patches of sunshine filtered through the leaves and lay like diamonds upon the ground.

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As they came near to it, they saw that the Jansens’ camp was beautifully situated. They had pitched their living tent on a strip of mossy turf, beneath some trees. It was far away from any village, looking out over the Lake, in full view of the old pleasure-house and garden. Two ponies were tethered a little way off, a house-boat was in the creek, and on its flat top were long chairs, a little table, cushions, and everything which goes to make up the comfort of a siesta.

Mrs. Jansen was sitting in the shade, near the water's edge, and came to meet them with a sort of languid grace. She was dressed in white, as usual, and held up a large pink parasol, which threw a rosy flush over her face.

"This is delightful—and how good of you to look me up," she began in her slightly drawling voice. "Yes, I *did* know you were here—my bearer told me—but I didn't like to intrude. I know that, generally, people coming to the Dhal like to be alone."

"I thought the same, but my husband overruled me," said Jane. "He insisted upon our coming."

Mr. Turner and Colonel Jansen drew off, and began to discuss a shooting expedition up one of the nullahs, that they were both anxious to carry out.

"I am glad—very glad," said Mrs. Jansen softly. "It would have been too unkind to leave me alone. I half hoped you would come. But I didn't know you had Mrs. Oakes with you. The last time I saw you you were waving good-byes, as you drove out of Mrs. Turner's compound with a white satin slipper hanging from the back of the gharry."

"And now I am a mem-sahib of a month's standing, and we are going to spend the rest of our leave at the Dhal."

"You have chosen wisely—very wisely," said Mrs. Jansen quietly. "It won't be long before you see it as I do."

"We thought we could not do better than come here."

"As we all love to do."

"Then you know it well?" asked Daisy with interest.

"Yes—very well—very well indeed," she answered gently.

"It is our first visit."

"Your first? Then I can tell you one thing, Mrs. Oakes—it won't be your last. People always return," she went on dreamily, "when once the Dhal has spoken to them. It calls, and they answer, and come back again—and again."

"Why you speak as if it were a person—a living thing," said Daisy wonderingly. "As if you understood. . . ."

"Living people have spent happy hours there," said Mrs. Jansen quickly, looking towards the garden house. "I know that. Lived and loved and suffered—then died. Perhaps they still live there, and watch us, and love through us. . . ."

"Why, how strange you are!" said Daisy, laughing a little. "I don't understand. Why should they return? Haven't they had enough of life already, that they should want to share ours?" She leant forward and began to dig little holes in the grass with the point of her parasol.

"Wouldn't you want to look at the water-lilies again, hear the fountains splash, and wander about those paths?" asked Mrs. Jansen earnestly. "Does that seem so very strange? If you had met your lover there, don't you think you'd return to the old haunts, and live over the scenes again? Or perhaps you can't understand. . . ."

"Oh yes, I might *wish* it," said Daisy lightly.

"But you don't think your wish would be strong enough to carry you back over years, perhaps centuries, of time?"

Mrs. Jansen spoke almost indulgently, as she might to a child.

"Has any wish that power?"

"Who knows? Cannot minds impress their surroundings—don't passions leave traces of themselves? Aren't these among the things that time can never eliminate?"

"I am out of my depth—hopelessly," said Daisy, laughing. "Come, Jane, confess that you are too. Tell Mrs. Jansen that she is talking far over *my* head, at least."

Exactly why, Jane could not have told, but she felt irritated at Mrs. Jansen's conversation. She could not have explained it, but the idea that she was familiar with the Dhal, returned to it year by year, loved its shores, its watching mountains, the clustering irises along its banks, its heavy water-lilies, gave her a feeling of uneasiness. A

subtle note of tenderness in her voice, a sort of caressing gentleness in the way she looked about her, impressed her unpleasantly. It was as if her love of her surroundings linked her to them, united them with a strange tie, made her join hands with all the beauty around.

She tried to detach her mind, and listen to the plans of the two men. But she did not care if they went this week or the next—or, in fact, if the expedition were abandoned altogether. She could not even simulate an interest in the map Bob produced. The soft tones of Mrs. Jansen and Daisy's light laughter held her attention unwillingly but unmistakably.

As she watched her she was struck by a certain difference in her appearance. She looked, if possible, more ethereal and elusive than ever. Her small face, with its clustering dark hair and large eyes, was the same, her thinness and slenderness were unchanged. But a new expression had appeared on her face, a subtle, unmistakable change seemed to have passed over her. She had quite lost the strained, anxious look she had worn in Sherpore. She no longer appeared like a woman who strives desperately for an object. Her attitude, her voice, showed repose and satisfaction.

Jane noticed, with a shock of surprise, how utterly one with her surroundings she appeared to be. Daisy was just a pretty young married woman in a strange country, she knew herself to be the typical mem-sahib of middle-age, Bob, Colonel Jansen, and Harry were hard-worked men on a holiday, perhaps a little out of the picture. But with Mrs. Jansen it was entirely different. In Sherpore she had always seemed a little bizarre, fantastic, a creature of moods and storms, and sudden changes. She had appeared too primitive a thing for the routine of station life, its conventionalities and officialdom. But here they were all aliens, except Sybil Jansen. She was a child of the mountains themselves, elusive as the mists which floated over them, as changing as the shadows on the slopes of the hills, as the

lights which chased each other over the glittering waters of the Lake.

Jane remembered, in her early youth, seeing an uncle on his holiday in the midst of the country, and being struck by a strange incongruity about him. Divorced from his habitual surroundings of telephone and office, he seemed out of his setting, a strange figure among the green fields and rustling woods.

When Daisy turned to talk to Jane and Colonel Jansen Mrs. Jansen hardly spoke. She seemed wrapped in thoughts of her own. The conversation going on round her could not bring her mind back to the present. It seemed wandering in far-off regions, with the ghosts of the past, or the nymphs of the Lake. She answered Mr. Turner, who was trying to talk to her with laboured politeness, with a sort of detached indifference.

Jane noticed with satisfaction that she made no effort to attract Harry's attention. She hardly even glanced in his direction. When he spoke to her, she answered rather listlessly, and began to talk formally.

As they walked back to their own camp, Daisy startled Jane by slipping her arm into hers, and saying :

"Hasn't Mrs. Jansen changed very much lately? Perhaps it is my imagination, but it seems as if she has lost all the old tricks of manner and nervousness. She seems more sure of herself."

"No, I didn't see any change," said Jane bluntly. She felt strangely annoyed.

"She does not fidget now. She is no longer the tiring person she used to be," went on Daisy. "She made me feel to-day—well, I don't quite know how to put it—but as an old girl makes a new school-girl feel, the first day of term." She laughed lightly. "Rather like an interloper."

"What rubbish, Daisy, you are talking."

"Do you know what I mean, Harry?"

“Can’t say I noticed anything.”

“How can you expect him to when his eyes were fixed on you the whole time?” asked Jane caustically. “He laughs when you do, shuts his mouth up when you are speaking, and altogether behaves as if we were all invisible.”

“Well, I shall get to the bottom of it—some day,” said Daisy gaily. “I was turning it over and over in my mind the whole time, and making the wildest answers. Now, if Harry and I are such poor company we had better go for a row by ourselves. I wonder what you were like fifteen years ago, Jane?”

“Never like you.”

“I shall ask Mr. Turner. Now don’t pretend to be cross. But I must say I’m surprised at your not noticing about Mrs. Jansen.”

CHAPTER V

"It's just the day for a row on the Lake," said Jane one morning. Her tone was that of someone who wishes to force a card, but is new to the business, and doubts her ability to carry it through successfully.

"Or to go into Srinagar," said Daisy. "I haven't seen it properly yet—we came through so quickly."

"We might even go for a stroll along the shore," suggested Harry. "It would be better for us than doing nothing."

"Well, fight it out among yourselves—only tell me what you have fixed upon," said Jane pleasantly.

"Personally, I incline to Srinagar. . . ."

"I think I saw the Jansens go in the direction of the walnut grove a few minutes ago."

"Then that settles *that*," said Mr. Turner with finality. "We don't want to run into them. We must retreat on Srinagar. Come along, Daisy, you shall have your wish. We'll be rowed in at our leisure, and make a day of it. I might even run to a second wedding present if we see anything that takes our fancy especially—but I'll make no promises."

"I think I shall stay at home," said Jane when she saw that the plan was fairly launched, and her husband could not be diverted now. "I believe I'm a little tired—I might even become a trifle cross, if I found the sun too hot, or the glare too trying."

"But you proposed it yourself."

"Have I not the privilege of changing my mind? I shall order one poached egg for my own lunch, so I shall

not run any danger of your return. Don't spend too much money, or buy things for which there is no possible use."

In this manœuvre Jane had an object. She had not incited them all to a wish for movement without some definite purpose in view. With a sigh of satisfaction she heard the boat put off, and her husband's voice die away in the distance, and knew that she had the camp to herself.

She had fixed the autumn as the time for "Alicia's Love Story" to be finished. So far it stopped very far short of completion. The heroine's admirers were scattered and dilatory. They refused to come to business. For all the help they gave, the girl might never have had any at all. They had become involved in affairs unconnected with Alicia. In fact it was obvious that a great deal had to be done before the final reunion on page 402 could be reached. Jane had never disappointed her readers of the happy ending. She was accustomed to accomplish it at all costs, in face of almost superhuman difficulties, and she knew if she ever failed to do so, it would be in the nature of a betrayal.

For the last few weeks her conscience had told her that she had left her characters in a sorry plight, that the skill of a specialist was needed to extricate them, that it was up to her—so to speak—to do this, and start them happily on the way to domestic bliss and sunny paths. She had been duly conscious of it—and the autumn had drawn closer. But it was no goad of conscience this morning, which led her to direct that her table should be placed in the greenest spot, down by the water, or to manœuvre that the rest of the party should leave the camp. It was, rather, a longing for work, a sudden desire to take up the story and work it out. As she had lain awake the night before, listening to the flapping of her tent door, and the sighing of the breeze, this feeling had come upon her. She could barely resist the desire to get up, light her lamp, and start to work at once. As the hours passed slowly, and at last a pallid streak had stolen across the sky, the plot—which

before had not been very clear—became unfolded to her mental vision, the characters seemed to take shape, and become possessed of a certain sharpness of outline.

Jane had had a letter from Emily Taylor that morning. She was spending the hot weather at Murree, and the next suite of rooms to hers were occupied by the Larcombes. Pretty little May was pursuing her blithe, light-hearted way, she reported—to the severe detriment of the men on leave. It was obvious to her hawk-like eye that it would not be long before she became engaged to Captain Grainger of the 10th —, a well-meaning young man of good means. Here Mrs. Taylor thought fit to make a few remarks on the subject of matrimony, and it would not be unfair to say that there was not one of them which had not been made at least a hundred times before. The whole letter breathed an air of platitude, of stale sentiment, of triteness, with an occasional gleam of shrewdness.

Jane wondered, as she glanced through it, what it must be like to view life through such eyes, to strip romance from everything to which it clung, to wipe out all glamour with a destructive finger. But it was probably for such as Emily Taylor that she herself wrote. She knew the placid atmosphere she created was described by such people as “pretty,” and felt the description was not undeserved. For the first time, a faint sense of dissatisfaction with her work filled her. Was it for this that Alicia prattled and Humphry maintained his heavy gloom? Could it be to give the Emily Taylors of this world a thrill? She had seen them in Hill station or Club verandah, holding up one of her books as a convenient screen, behind which they strove to conceal a certain drowsiness which overcame them. She had always concealed herself under a masculine pen-name, which had enabled her to observe the reception of her work. Hitherto it had not vexed her to see the ease with which it was laid aside, the very fleeting impression her characters made on the majority of readers. Now it stirred in her a vague discon-

tent. She put the crackling sheets of Emily's letter back into the envelope with a hardly suppressed sigh.

She settled herself in her chair, called out "Chup"¹ once or twice in the direction of the servants' quarters, and started to work with a zest she had not felt for months.

After a little she became conscious that she was writing with an ease and facility she had never been conscious of before. She tackled a scene between Alicia and her evil genius—a widow of the correct colouring for the part and unpleasant designs—which she had already attempted unsuccessfully once or twice. She knew she had written it with a dramatic note sounding all through, very unlike the rather tame treatment she had given it before. It suggested another development—then another.

"They'll have to go in to Srinagar a good many mornings," she murmured softly to herself, "if I'm ever to finish. Some of it'll have to be rewritten—about that there's no question. How could I ever have put down such stuff? I doubt whether Emily would care about this chapter at all—but that's high praise! I seem to have risen out of the ordinary for once."

Her attention was distracted for a moment by seeing the figure of a man pacing up and down the little strip below the camp, near the water's edge. He stopped occasionally, and, standing still, looked earnestly along the shores of the Lake, shading his eyes from the glare with his hands. Then he turned and walked up and down again.

"Wonder what he's watching," thought Jane.

Then she took up her pen and wrote quickly. She never had to pause for a word or the turn of a sentence. The difficulty was to get it down fast enough. The ideas that had come to her last night seemed to strengthen the plot.

After a little, the bearer's white-coated figure appeared through the trees. He came to announce that tiffin was

¹ Be quiet.

ready. She ate it as fast as possible, and returned to her seat under the chenars.

She looked up after a little, in the midst of remodelling a chapter, and caught sight of the man again. As she watched him he turned towards her, and she realised with a shock of surprise that it was Harry.

She waved her pen at him, then got up and went a few steps towards him.

"I was wondering who you were. I thought you had gone in to Srinagar."

"Too hot," he called out laconically.

"I was watching you without knowing who it was! Isn't it baking on that little strip?"

"Fairly."

"So Daisy and Bob have gone in together?"

"Yes."

"That was kind of her. She knows he hates to be alone. I've had tiffin, but Abdul can collect some remains for you if you want them."

She went back to her table slowly. She wrote half a page with difficulty. Her eyes kept wandering to the little beach where Harry had spent the morning.

Then she forgot all in the absorption of her story.

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Mr. Turner and Daisy came back very pleased with their expedition. It seemed, from all accounts, that they had spent a very pleasant day. He had suggested—only because he felt it a matter of duty, not in any way because he liked it—that they should climb the stony and uphill path which led to the Tahkt-i-Sulliman. She had refused without hesitation, and he had rejoiced at the words. As a reward for this he had given her a really charming necklace of turquoise, cunningly united on a chain of seed-pearls, which they had found in a bazaar. They had watched a polo match, admired the gardens, bought some photographs, and evaded everyone they knew.

After tea the Oakes went off for a stroll by themselves, and the Turners went down to the little strip of turf below the tents, at the edge of the water.

"I saw the La Touches, Jenny. Such a joke," said Mr. Turner.

"You met them?"

"I didn't say *they* saw *us*. I took jolly good care they didn't—but it took some skill. She came along with that funny sort of rolling walk which always makes me think of a sailor ashore, under a huge umbrella. They had another woman with them who looked pretty bored. He was telling an anecdote. Do I not know it? Have I not dined there?"

"Not the one about the man who stuttered . . . with the American accent . . . and . . ."

"The very one."

"As if you could hear it at that distance."

"I tell you his voice carries."

"Well, go on with the story."

"He had got to the point where one always laughs—but one ought not to. One so hopes it is the end. Nothing annoys him more. The second woman was smiling, in a tepid sort of way. I laughed from force of habit—then we realised our danger, and bolted into Lamah Joo's. And I didn't get out of that shop, my dear Jane, until I'd spent—well, I won't tell you how many rupees. There's no doubt about it that the La Touches are too expensive friends for us.

"Then we watched the polo. Daisy barricaded us off from the outside world with that pink parasol of hers, the one with the ridiculous bobbing things on it, so we escaped without detection, although there was danger all round us."

"What a senseless fuss. As if it could hurt anybody to talk a little to their fellow-creatures."

"We were far happier as we were. Daisy and I hit it off very well together. Little as you may relish it, my

dear, we get on famously when we're alone. She enjoyed the spice of adventure, like a sensible girl, and . . . hullo! what's up?"

Jane's eyes—those faithful mirrors which always reflected the thoughts that were passing in her mind—suddenly assumed a startled expression.

"Whatever's the matter?" repeated Mr. Turner anxiously.

"Nothing—nothing at all."

"But it must be something. Don't be silly, Jane—you look quite upset. You surely don't mind my saying that Daisy and I . . . But no, you couldn't be so foolish."

"I've only noticed . . ."

"Well, out with it."

"I suddenly discovered that one can see the Jansens' camp from here."

"What of that?"

"Well, it surprised me—that's all."

"For goodness' sake don't interrupt me again for a thing like that! It's a most annoying habit of yours. I really thought something was wrong. You gave me quite a turn—you did indeed."

"I'm sorry, Bob. I won't do it again," said Jane meekly.

"Now where was I? I believe you've driven the entire thing right out of my head. Oh yes, on the way back I picked up another rug, in a funny, out-of-the-way place I've never seen before. It was really going for a song. We want one badly for the dining-room in Sherpore—you've said so yourself a score of times at least."

But even this did not arouse in Jane the vexation she would ordinarily have felt. Her mind was slowly connecting two links into a chain.

The Jansens' camp could be seen from where they were sitting. And Harry had spent the morning there.

It was a tiny thing like a cloud the size of a man's hand in the west, a straw being driven along by the wind, a petal swept down-stream showing the direction of the current.

CHAPTER VI

THE days began to move forward monotonously, unbroken by any event. They passed in a gentle, placid succession, following each other without any difference, anything that could make them stand out in the memory, or separate them. Hours of golden sunshine were followed by hot scented nights, when the heavy darkness seemed to lie over the Lake and gardens like a mantle, till the pale dawn crept up and lifted it away. Through the long hours the water lapped the shore, and rustled the weeds at its edge with an odd impatience, a sort of covert restlessness, which chafed at any bounds.

A sort of apathy seemed to have descended upon the little camp beneath the chenars. Bob Turner, who was always so energetic, so tiresomely full of plans for himself and other people—so his wife was accustomed to complain—that he would neither rest himself nor allow others to do so, now spoke no more of shooting-expeditions after bear, but lay in the shade, watching the light flicker through the branches. His habits of routine seemed to have slipped from him like a mantle. He made no inquiries about letters, he never attempted to write any himself. He not only did not do the same things at the same hour every day, but resented being told that he had ever done so. He disliked even all mention of Sherpore, refused to go into Srinagar for fear he might meet people he knew, and snubbed Harry at every mention of "shop."

"For goodness' sake don't, Jane," he said one day, irritably, when his wife made some allusion to a tour in his district which he would have to make during the coming

cold weather. "Do let this be a real holiday. Let us live in the present. Don't harp upon the future. Above all, don't chatter."

"Very well, dear."

"And don't make such unending allusions to 'when we strike camp' or 'moving on.' Aren't you satisfied?"

"Perfectly."

"You're enjoying yourself?"

"Very much."

"Then let other people do the same."

Jane closed her eyes. She tried to remember if Bob had ever spoken to her quite in this way before. If so it had escaped her memory. She could not recollect ever having heard that combined note of annoyance and irritation in his voice. It seemed funny to have to pacify him like a child, or in much the same way as she had noticed other women treated their husbands. But somehow she did not mind. It did not seem to matter. It was a thousand times more important how soon that bright streak of sunshine on the grass would be covered up by shadows, if that blue patch on the hills would turn to darkest purple. She longed to see if everything would be bathed in softest amethyst, as it had been last evening as the sun sank behind the bank of mountains. She did not seem to care to worry about other things while this panorama of loveliness unfolded itself before her, taking on new colours every hour of the day, always changing, eluding, retreating, only to appear again with joy to its faithful watcher. She only felt conscious of a deep pervading laziness. Bob's inertia seemed to have descended upon her too. She wondered if she would ever feel angry again. Just now it did not seem possible. The remembrance of filling up engagements in a book, having day after day arranged for, seemed utterly dreadful.

What a silly thing it was to rush from place to place when you could just dream through the days, and sleep

through the nights, or even lie awake and listen to the croaking of the frogs, the ripple of the water, the gentle stirring in the poplar grove near by. Sometimes, through the door of her tent, she would watch the stars peering over the edge of the mountains; once even she got up and wandered about the camp, through the hot, thick darkness and the heavy scents, down to the water's edge. Far away, on a house-boat, some lights had flickered, the sound of a song floated across the water, the twang of a guitar and a voice which rose and fell, then was lost in a chorus. Then it began again, stopped suddenly, and all was still and quiet again. One night some Cashmeri boatmen had sung, deep, full-throated voices, rising in curious cadences, strange sounds to a Western ear, with something tuneless but fascinating in it, something strangely akin to the night and the darkness.

Yes, Jane had begun to love this delicious languor, the slow passing of the day, the countless hours which were slipping away, calm, unbroken, the repose of her mind, the atmosphere of rest which surrounded them. She had come to love, in a way she thought she never could, the prospect of numberless to-morrows, a chain which stretched away to a point somewhere far in the future when she would again return to routine.

"Jane." Bob's voice broke the silence suddenly.

She pretended to be asleep. It was altogether too much trouble to answer. She even attempted a slight snore, but it was the effort of an amateur, and unconvincing.

"Jane," he said sharply again.

She roused herself with an effort.

"We must give up the expedition to Islamabad. Harry doesn't wish it. He wants to stop quietly here, till it gets too hot and we must move. I saw it at once. You mustn't press it—you must learn to let a subject drop."

It seemed to Mrs. Turner too poor a thing to have awakened her for. Any time would have done for it. She settled herself back in her chair.

"Is that all you wish to say?" she asked.

"D'you want to go to sleep again?"

"If you have nothing further to say."

"Don't be sarcastic, Jane—it doesn't suit you. It's not your style. I don't care to hear you ape that manner. I don't like it at all."

"Is that really all?"

"You know that sleeping makes people fat?"

"I don't believe it."

"There's danger for you that way, my dear. Remember that photograph of your great-aunt. You should never have shown me that. I thought it was a mistake at the time. But it's a warning to you of what you might become."

"You should have thought of all this before you married me."

Bob looked at her critically. She could have sworn he was wondering just why he had married her. There was a tightening about the corners of his mouth, a slight tilt about one of his eyebrows, that told her the thoughts that were passing through his brain. He was looking at her as a stranger might, dispassionately, with the cold scrutiny from which a wife would do well to hide. As she met his eyes Jane began to wonder about it too. She had never given it a thought before. Now it seemed to come uppermost in her mind, like an idea that cannot be gainsaid. She knew herself for a not very attractive middle-aged woman, with a topee a little awry, a wisp of hair that had become loosened fluttering over her face. The heat had made her flushed, her hands, as they lay in her lap, looked to her hot and roughened. She knew the picture was not flattering, but somehow it did not seem to matter. She even smiled slightly.

"I should brush myself up a bit before tea, if I were you," Bob said a little disparagingly.

"What were you going to say?"

"Say? Oh yes. Well, something has struck me lately, something I meant to talk over with you. You are very fond of saying I am unobservant." He cleared his throat slightly, and paused.

"What have you observed?" she asked lightly.

"I am not sure that I shall tell you. If you're so precious sharp you can find out for yourself."

"Then why wake me up? Now I think of it, I think I shall take your advice, and tidy up for tea. It was a good idea of yours that my hair wanted brushing. When I see myself in my glass I dare say I shall think of a lot of other improvements."

"Jane, Jane, come back."

Mrs. Turner allowed herself to be persuaded.

"It's about Daisy . . . and Harry," began Mr. Turner tentatively.

"What about them?" she asked sharply. She faced him suddenly. Why did Bob probe into things like this?

"We've been married fifteen years, haven't we?" went on Mr. Turner, and his voice was a good deal kinder than before.

"Yes, yes. Fifteen this summer. What an age it seems."

"Well, in all that time we've not had a serious disagreement. Oh yes, I remember all about the time when you wanted to go to Simla, and I thought Murree was best, and the number of nights I dined out in Mess. I said *serious*. All that was on the surface. We talked it over together, and it came out square. We started again, and you *did* go to Simla, and a nice expense. . . . But there, we won't go into all that again."

"No, I heard more than enough about it at the time."

"Well, it's struck me once or twice lately that Daisy and Harry aren't going to *last* in the way we have. In fifteen years it isn't going to be the same thing—no, nor anything like it with them. Why already . . ."

"You forget the difference in material, Bob," said Jane earnestly. "You are what I call an even-tempered man. You are generally reasonable, and when you can be induced to listen and rest your own voice for a time, you can be made to see sense. Now Harry is different. He's a brooding sort of person. If there's anything wrong he doesn't talk it out, but thinks it over quietly by himself. Things lay hold of him, and rankle."

"That may be so, but it isn't going to help them."

"Then Daisy's not like me, not even like what I was as a young woman. She is fanciful and highly-strung, as those fragile girls so often are. I was always—common-place."

"It's carried us along, Jane."

"They've had a little disagreement. Oh! I can see quite plainly, but it will pass. It won't live out the week. You needn't distress yourself or me like this—it's absurd."

"Well, Jane, I expect you're right," Mr. Turner said slowly. "I dare say you see a good deal deeper than I do, when all's said and done. But it does seem a bit queer to me, when they're only just off their honeymoon. Church bells hardly stopped ringing before this sort of thing begins. But . . ."

"How often have I begged you to finish your sentences?" asked his wife sharply. "There is nothing, to me, so aggravating as a 'but' or an 'and' with nothing to follow. It's so pointless and silly. I can't think why you do it."

"Sorry, Jane. I'll try and remember. It must be a bit of a trial. I'll break myself of the habit as it annoys you so much. To tell you the truth, I quite forget what it is I *was* going to say. Oh! yes. I know."

He pulled out his pipe, and began to fill it with a deliberation which exasperated his wife. She longed, at that moment, to seize it and hurl it fathoms deep into the

Lake, and so bring about the serious quarrel that had never yet been known.

“Why don’t you make up your mind what you want to say before you begin, and then say it, or leave it unsaid?”

“Oh, I don’t know.” Then with an air of changing the subject he added: “I think it is a great pity that the Jansens came up here at all.”

CHAPTER VII

AFTER Mr. Turner had gone off to his tent, Jane sat on by herself. She knew that a few days ago a vague disquiet had begun to stir in her mind. It had recurred at night when she woke up, and prevented her dropping off again into the dreamless slumber to which she was accustomed.

The habit of rest into which her body had fallen had also extended to her mind. Even little worries about Guy seemed to have slipped far away from the zone of things that mattered, into a nebulous region beyond. When she thought about it at all she concluded that at Sherpore the activities of life had in reality tired her, that she had needed this to regain tone and balance, that she would emerge later refreshed and strengthened. The faint first appearing of this disquietude had crept in almost unperceived.

At first she had hardly noticed it. It had only worried her in moments of fatigue. She had not seriously considered it, nor admitted its presence. It had seemed to belong to that remote circle of outside things that need not affect or incommode her.

It had started the morning that she had noticed Harry on the little beach. It had slipped into her thoughts then, almost without her noticing it. It had not grown, nor become more important till her husband's words of a few minutes ago. They had increased it a hundredfold. She was greatly incensed at his observation. She felt she might have forgotten it if it had remained unexpressed. Now she knew her chance of doing so was very slight.

He came out of his tent and called to her.

“Come for a walk, Jenny.”

“No, I don't wish to.”

He came closer and looked at her attentively. He seemed to be observing her closely. She disliked the inspection and spoke fretfully :

“Go off by yourself.”

“You haven't stirred all day.”

“What does it matter ? ”

“Oh, very well.”

She thought she detected in his retreating form a certain relief. He did not turn and wave to her as he generally did when he reached the walnut tree, but plodded on steadily without a backward glance. He appeared to her to be looking about him with a certain pleasure and enjoyment. Tinker followed closely at his heels.

Jane sighed a little as she watched him out of sight.

When he had disappeared between the trees, her mind slipped back again. She knew that her irritation with him would not have been so great if he had pressed her to go with him. If he had slipped his arm in hers and called for the topee of the mem-sahib she would not have minded so much. But he had gone taking even the friendly Tinker with him and left her with disquieting thoughts, that would have been lulled to rest if it had not been for his tactlessness.

As she sat turning things over in her mind, the thought that remained uppermost was the knowledge that Bob was not naturally observant. He generally received the impression that he was intended to receive. Subtle shades of feeling were lost upon him. It was really only the obvious that struck him.

So that is what this had become. The thing that she had hardly faced herself, had not thought worthy of much consideration, had been apparent to him. The trifling cloud that had drifted across Daisy's sky had been described in crude words by him. He had remarked it, and commented upon it.

The Oakes came up, and looked down smilingly upon her.

“Come for a row, Jane. We are going towards Srinagar.”

“No, no, I prefer to stay here.”

“But we want you—we do indeed.”

“Then you oughtn’t to—it’s absurd.”

“You’ll write, perhaps?”

“I might, I can’t say.”

“Come along, Harry, we’re in the way.”

She watched them as they got into the shikara. The boatman Sultana showed his row of perfect teeth in a responsive smile. A dog jumped in beside them. The steady strokes of the paddles sounded in the water, the swish of the weeds as they brushed against the boat.

Here they were going off in the way they used to do. They looked now as they looked in the early days of their engagement. Their marriage had been but the expected sequel to the first instalment of the story.

But was it just the same? Had he always worn that look of preoccupation and reserve? Had not the tiniest difference entered in, the slightest shade of feeling that no words could adequately explain or define? Had it not been her suggestion that they should go off together? Jane had heard the plan mooted at lunch, and noticed that Daisy had urged it upon her husband.

She had become a little silent, and to her it was as unnatural a state as an unplayful one would be to a kitten. She would come and sit in Jane’s tent looking a little preoccupied, would let her work fall and gaze into the distances with vague, unseeing eyes.

She no longer afforded Mr. Turner the entertainment he expected from her, and though he made no comment upon it, Jane knew it afforded him some surprise. She no longer chaffed him, laughed at his moods, made light of his little weaknesses, joked with him in the way that he loved. Some days she seemed as full of happiness as ever, then the faintest tinge of sadness would creep over her. She appeared to Jane like one who has been possessed with the joy of

Life, then led gently to look upon its less radiant side. Her mind had been straying down its happier roads, now she had been forced to acknowledge to herself that there are bypaths where the light is dim and the going not so easy. It had not dismayed her, only for the time cast a shade over the radiance of her happiness. It was almost a reminder of the earlier part of her life, like a finger pointing backwards at the less sunny reaches of the road.

But the change was so slight—Jane assured herself of it with joy. Some days it did not seem there at all, and she upbraided herself for a suspicious woman. Then a downward glance, a silence, a long pause, and she would know that Daisy was thinking. Her mind was engaged in the process of turning something this way and that, wondering, speculating, comparing, till she had only a half-hearted interest to give to those about her.

Jane began to wonder and speculate about her own share in it. Had she placed Daisy in a *mise en scène* that was not favourable to her? Had she neglected to give the child the background that was best suited to her? Had any laxity on her part loosened her hold and lessened her attraction? Or was it merely one of those things that drift into one's circle without one being able to detect the current that brings them there?

As she thought of it she became convinced of one conclusion. If a cloud had drifted up as light as the scud that flies across the sky before an easterly wind, it was as it were an outside occurrence. No deed or word could be said to be directly responsible for it. It was probably a phase as passing as it was unimportant. It would go as mysteriously as it had appeared. The well balanced in mind would feel no concern about it.

"It will pass," she repeated softly to herself. "Like other clouds it will drift away. But I have become the most foolish of old women. If I'm going to brood like this, what will my life be like?"

Why could not Bob have let her go on in the calm that had been hers? Why must he run to her when the slightest annoyance vexed his spirit? Once she would have accepted it willingly, unquestioningly. It had been the rule of her married life. Now it seemed to her irksome and unjust, making her share of the partnership heavy. She had her own vexations to bear. Why must she be burdened with his as well? At that moment she wished that he would stop out walking until far into the evening. She did not want him back just yet. She felt there might be a possibility of her being betrayed into sharp words, that she might ask him angrily what he meant by his suggestion, might use her nimble tongue to his discomfiture. She did not much mind the thought of wounding him—this caused her a momentary surprise—but she dreaded the disclosures he would make. He might have noticed this and that, and her trouble would increase. She wanted no discussion or explanation. If he could observe, then so could she.

So Jane started on that phase of watching—almost unconsciously noting every detail—that finds so much to its undoing, and drives repose so utterly away.

CHAPTER VIII

ONE day Jane and Daisy rowed into Srinagar to do some shopping. The stores needed replenishing, the former explained, their appetites had been sharper than she bargained for, she must not forget that she was housekeeper to the party.

Harry had pretended not to hear when the plan was suggested. He had feigned slumber when his wife glanced wistfully in his direction, even allowed his head to drop back against the cushions as though utterly overcome with drowsiness.

Mr. Turner had an engagement not unconnected with a deck chair and a novel, in which a peg held a conspicuous position, for the early hours of the afternoon. Even Tinker chose the shadiest spot in the camp, lay himself down, refused to come when called, and pretended an overpowering exhaustion and fatigue.

"Very well, Jane. Yes—I suppose we'd better go . . .," said Daisy listlessly. "Unless . . ." She looked towards her husband. "Oh yes, let's start soon, before it gets too hot," she added quickly.

"I'll call Sultana and the men," said Mr. Turner.

"Come along," cried Jane briskly. "Just look at my list! And Abdul will be adding other things to it if I don't manage to evade him. All this to be got through before the evening!"

So the two women were rowed in alone, through the weeds and water-lilies under the hill from which the fort of Hari Parbat looks down upon the town, past the shrines, and clustering villages, to Srinagar itself.

Then they left the boat, and wandered through the Chenar Bagh, over the soft grassy slopes under the trees, watched the dungas and house-boats tied up by the edge of the river, and criticised the camping-grounds.

"There's no place I'd rather be in than where we are, Daisy," said Jane happily, as they strolled slowly under the trees, "I haven't seen a camp that I even like half as well. All these people are too close together, though I don't suppose they think so, but when one's living this sort of life I like to be alone."

"No," Daisy answered absently. "You're a contented woman, Jane. Everything you have is all right, your camp, your husband, your friends."

"Well, I suppose I am."

"You give one the impression of never having wanted a thing very much without getting it. Have you ever really felt discontented in your life?"

"What about?" asked Jane prosaically.

"That's just it. What about? Every other woman could give you a string of complaints in the time you took to say that. You don't look for causes for discontent—that's what it is, Jane. You wait till it's thrust upon you, then it's time to grumble."

"Oh! There are the Jacksons," cried Mrs. Turner suddenly. "Look this way, Daisy, or they'll see us. Pretend to be admiring this house-boat. It's charming, isn't it? Just look at all those cushions and rugs under the trees. These people know how to be comfortable. Now dare I look round? Yes, they're gone. What a relief! She's a woman who never stops talking. What *would* Bob have said if I'd let loose a horde of people on him?"

"It's quite safe now—they're out of sight."

"Let's stroll up the Moonshee Bagh and then begin our shopping. What were we talking about? Oh yes, being contented. Well, that's life, my dear. Don't fret about

the plums of existence, but be satisfied with the plums you have. When I was young . . . but there! That was long ago."

"You knew Mr. Turner all your life, didn't you?"

"No, no. A year after I came out to India."

"Then when you married you were old friends?"

"More or less I suppose we were. He had put in a good deal of time at our bungalow before we ever thought of being engaged. Mother had been asked to be kind to him. She knew his people at home. I was kind to him—very. In fact I did my best for him. I married him."

"You had every chance. You started with knowing each other before you fell in love," said Daisy soberly.

"Oh, Jane, I believe that's everything—just to understand a little. Once you start on the romantic tack, you're blinded—you no longer see straight."

Mrs. Turner looked at her sharply.

"What makes you say all this, Daisy?"

"I don't know. I never have before. But it seems to me that marriage with a man you don't really know is like sending a child into a strange country without a guide-book."

"The clever woman knows her guide-book by instinct. There is nothing to be gained by sitting down and comparing differences. That is like the people who are always counting up what they *haven't* got, and that list is never a short one. Did you think this when you were up the valleys with Harry?"

"No, no. Oh dear, no."

"Or when you first came to us at the Dhal?"

"I don't think so."

"Perhaps it is the sight of Bob and I that has stirred up all these thoughts? To-day you have begun to think—and wonder."

"I suppose so."

"Well, my dear, don't. I could say it a dozen times.

Don't you see once you start wondering anything about men—or the individual man—that you've started on one of the biggest enigmas going? D'ye think you're going to solve it? I . . . Oh, dear me, there are the Stauntons just coming out of that shop! Now if ever there's a woman whom I'd choose *not* to meet, it's her. You can't shake her off, she's worse than a box-wallah. Come quickly up this turning—we shall just be in time. One thing I've quite decided—I shan't come in to Srinagar again. I shall send in Sultana to do my shopping. What a fright they gave me!"

Having eluded the Stauntons, Jane seriously set herself to the business of the day. With a boatman carrying a basket, a list, pencil and price lists, she started to buy her stores, gravely entering into every detail, intent upon not wasting one pice of Bob's money, on getting the best possible value for the lowest possible price. About anything of this sort she was deliberate, careful and painstaking. She had made housekeeping her hobby, and never allowed anything to distract her when she was engaged upon it.

Daisy watched her with interest. Was this being married, she wondered? Was this the art of matrimony perfected? Is it to conceal yourself under a widespreading, unbecoming topee of obsolete pattern, a dress on which the ravages of the dirzie are only too apparent, and walk about in uninteresting shops comparing prices, while your husband lies at his ease under cool trees, hopefully anticipating the next meal? Is it to elude all friends for fear they may vex him, to dart down a byway to avoid a woman he dislikes, to sneak up a street looking anxiously from side to side?

She had not wanted to come to Srinagar that afternoon, but would have much preferred to remain in the camp. A little—a very little persuasion—from her husband would have induced her to stay, but she had not had it. He had

somehow failed to catch her eye at the critical moment, so a little piqued with him she had agreed to come with Jane.

A short time ago she would not have believed that Harry could be happy without her for an afternoon. Now the faint suspicion that he *might* disturbed her a little. He could so easily have come too and spent the afternoon at the Club, or even induced her to stay behind.

Jane crossed in front of her, and she was struck by the way her skirt hung. It was not good. Even for Srinaragar or a camp by the Dhal, it was not good enough. There was not a spot on the globe where it would have passed muster. Daisy admitted it freely to herself, by which it will be seen that it was very bad indeed.

But Mr. Turner was devoted to Jane, she had sufficient perception to see that. Beneath his bantering teasing there lay a very real affection, a solid rock which it would take a lot to move. She dimly realised as she watched her in conflict with the obsequious baboo who kept the store, that Bob Turner's love for his wife was something above and beyond topees and drooping skirts. And she herself was young—oh far younger than Jane—and her skirt did not sag. She knew she was a fresh and dainty sight. If her little camp looking-glass had not told her so, the glances of the passers-by—more especially the masculine portion of it—would have done so. She knew that her hair waved, that her eyes were grey and sweet, her step light and springy. She felt that from the top of her white hat to the tips of her little shoes, that she was as refreshing a sight as any of the girls that they met strolling along the Bund, or sitting in the house-boats. But Harry had remained by the Dhal. . . .

“Jane, isn't it time we went back?” she asked suddenly, when the last of the shopping was done.

“Well, dear, if you like. But I thought perhaps you might care to look in at the Markhams'. I used to know

them at Pindi, and they've settled up here. They wouldn't come out to the Dhal . . . and they have a daughter about your age. I thought . . ."

"Isn't it too late for that?"

"Just as you like. Well, how about the Club?"

But Daisy wanted to get back. She was in a fever to return to their own camp. She wondered if Harry had lain in the shade all the afternoon, and carried on a desultory conversation with Mr. Turner, or if he had wandered about by himself. Had he missed her at all? Had he looked out for the return of the boat and wondered at their being so long? She longed to know. She wanted to see the expression in his eyes when they returned, to watch the rather sombre look on his face lift, and the happy satisfied content creep over it, which came whenever she drew near. She wanted it so much that the long row back to the camp seemed insupportable.

"To tell you the truth," she began deliberately, "I don't really care much about meeting the Markhams—or other people. I like being alone, where we are, just with you and Mr. Turner, without troubling about society. And if you go to the Club aren't you sure to meet old friends? Doesn't it strike you as a little unwise?"

Jane looked scared.

"I'd forgotten that. No, no, I couldn't face Bob. After all he's said. . . . Let's take a boat instead, and row down the river towards the City. We should pass right in front of the Maharajah's palace, and we might go down as far as one of the bridges. If we meet anyone on the water we could pretend not to recognise them. The glare, you know, and we have our parasols."

"We could—but they wouldn't believe it," said Daisy flatly.

"You'd love the waterways down to the river, and the steps where they wash the clothes, and the shining temples. We might go down a little further and . . ."

"But we shouldn't get home to-night," said Daisy, aghast.

"No-o. I suppose there won't be time!" admitted Jane reluctantly. "We'd better go and pick up our boat. Dear me! How nice to be going back to our chenars. I think I should have died if we had tied up in the river here, and I had to bow and smirk to my friends every morning. As it is the bother of dressing up has been a bore, even to-day."

As they were rowing home in the evening, leaving the shops and box-wallahs and teeming life of Srinagar behind them, Jane said suddenly:

"Have you just realised that there are depths in Harry that you haven't sounded before? Is that why you talked as you did this morning?"

Daisy awoke out of her reverie with a start. She had been looking straight ahead with dreamy eyes. She had hardly seen the people along the banks, the hurrying coolies, toiling women, the curious barges full of river life. The sweetmeat seller under a canopy of matting slung up to shade him from the sun, which had engaged Jane's attention as they passed, had affected her not a whit, nor the begging children who ran along the bank beside the boat.

It seemed so long since they had started that morning. So many hours had passed by—rather tedious hours for her—during which she had only longed to be back again.

"Yes, Jane, I suppose that's it," she answered unwillingly.

"But, my dear, I'd rather hear you say that you don't understand Harry, than that he doesn't understand you. That is the watchword of the woman who's failed—yes—failed. Never, never say it even to yourself. Of all feeble, self-pitying cries that tongue ever raised! And when people tell you that, they think in some way it explains it all, excuses the mistakes, the blunders, the follies."

But Daisy was hardly listening.

“What a long way it seems,” she said restlessly. “What a long, long way home again. I’d forgotten the Dhal was so far out. It seems as if we were never going to get there. The boatmen don’t seem to me to be making any progress at all.”

CHAPTER IX

“WHAT d’ye say to a picnic?” asked Mr. Turner one afternoon after tiffin.

“A capital suggestion—by all means,” said Jane heartily.

“You are full of ideas—splendid ones,” cried Daisy.

“Where shall we go?”

Mr. Turner hesitated a little and avoided his wife’s eye. He then knocked the ashes out of his pipe with some deliberation.

“The Jansens thought . . .”

“The Jansens?” echoed everybody rather blankly.

“Well, they suggested it. The fact is I was over at their camp before tiffin—it seems churlish never to go near them, and none of you others ever trouble yourselves overmuch about them—and they thought of it. The Emperor’s garden, they said, would be a good place.”

“I might have known she wouldn’t leave us alone for long,” said Jane crossly.

“Well, you’re quite wrong about that. She never said one word. It was his doing,” said Mr. Turner, slightly aggrieved. “In fact she didn’t seem particularly keen on the plan. Rather hung back, I thought. Sat looking out over the Lake as though it were all of no importance whatever.”

“When do we start?” asked Harry abruptly.

“Oh it’s all settled then, is it?”

“Whoever thought of it, it is a happy idea,” said Daisy. Then she added coaxingly: “Come, Jane, you wanted to spend some time in the gardens, and you and Colonel Jansen can have one of the nice long talks which you always enjoy so much.”

“ We thought of each going in our own boats, and meeting there,” said Mr. Turner. “ We’ll take the bearer and the tea-basket, and row over about four. Perhaps we shall be able to get the mallie to turn on the fountains for us.”

The plan appeared quite inviting sketched like this. Daisy expressed herself as absolutely longing to see the gardens at close quarters, Harry even roused himself to say that it was a thing they simply must do ; they could not return to Sherpore with this unaccomplished. Mr. Turner began to look upon himself as rather to be commended for the idea, and went off to fuss over the preparation of the tea-basket with an air of importance which always betokened with him a state of enjoyment. Jane even looked at her watch to see how soon they could start.

Three men and three women are sitting under spreading chenar trees, while attentive servants put tea before them. A cloudless sky above, fading on the horizon to palestopal, silhouettes the palace house against it. The Lake stretching away as far as eye can reach, is covered with its water-weeds and lilies. The subtle scent of an Indian garden is all around, the ripple of water as it runs into sunk tanks from the fountains on the grassy terraces above, its restless lapping as it frets against the landing-stage are the only sounds to be heard. And behind it all, like some grim reminder, the sheer side of the hill, rising harsh and arid, cuts into the blue of the sky with sharp outlines, looks down upon the greenness of the garden among its clustering trees, with a watchful eye.

Could anything be added to complete the harmony of the picture ?

“ So this is where the Emperors played,” said Jane reflectively.

She sat next to Mrs. Jansen. Harry had placed himself near his wife ; Mr. Turner and Colonel Jansen were side by side.

"I've been reading all about it in some guide-book," said Daisy brightly, looking about her with the sharp, alert expression of the sightseer who means to miss nothing. "One ought to, I think—don't you? It's so awkward, if one is asked, not to know a thing about places one's been to."

"I never look at them—I prefer my own impressions!" said Colonel Jansen.

"But your impressions don't supply dates and that sort of thing."

"Dates?" echoed Jane with a sort of horror. "My dear, who cares for them in a place like this?"

"This is a holiday—I do wish you'd all try and remember it," said Mr. Turner rather plaintively. "The idea of talking about guide-books here! If I see one I shall throw it into the water."

"I like facts," said Daisy with a touch of obstinacy. "And one must take an interest . . ."

"But we value your own views, dear," said Jane gently. "Anything that strikes you is better than all the information you have gleaned from other people's brains. That's what Bob means."

"Yes, yes—that's what I mean," said Mr. Turner pompously.

"Now you have been at least three months in the East I expect your opinion is getting quite matured about it, Mrs. Oakes," said Colonel Jansen, smiling across at Daisy. She was looking particularly fresh this afternoon, in the crispest of muslins and a hat, the flimsy nature of which rearoused Mr. Turner's ire every time his eye lighted upon it. On seeing it on her head this afternoon he had prophesied gloomily an attack of sunstroke.

"Yes, what did you first think about it, Daisy?" asked her husband. "Before Mrs. Turner told you what you *ought* to think."

"Like everybody else, I think it was the contrasts," she said slowly. "The native carriages all emblazoned and

splendid, tied together with string, the utterly disreputable hanger-on who appeared from the back, the display of wealth and the most abject poverty, not round the corner as it is in other countries, but there with it, alongside, hand in hand as it were. . . .”

“Yes—I have heard other people say that too.”

“Then the bazaars! Such rushing to and fro and chattering and excitement, and yet underneath it all the real calm of the East, the utter contempt for time or hurry. I can’t tell you what strikes me in particular. Why—everything strikes me.”

“That’s India,” said Jane softly. “With its charm, its squalor, its suffering and poverty, its unutterable fascination. When you think you never can forgive her, she calls to you again in some subtle way that you cannot but hear, whispers through the cry of the bazaar, the creaking of the waterwheel, wins you back with a breath of air that has passed over the jasmine bushes, one flutter of the marigold.”

“Making lovers which always remain faithful,” said Mrs. Jansen.

“I never really loved England till I had seen India,” said Daisy. “And yet I shall see her with such different eyes when I go back.”

“Don’t you think it is because the beauty we are accustomed to is straight and clear before us? We see it at home on every lilac bush, in the winding village street, the wayside commons with their gorse, in all the woods and fields?” asked Colonel Jansen. “It strikes you with its wholesomeness, its completeness. It never hides from you, even on a grey day. It has none of the arts of the coquette, no wiles, no deceptions. But with India . . .” he paused.

“Yes, with India,” echoed Mrs. Jansen.

“You all know how it is. How she eludes you that you may catch her again with joy, clings to you when you think you have shaken her off, revives some memory when

you are thousands of miles away, which makes you long to be with her again."

"When I am at home," said Mrs. Jansen quietly, "I love the rounded outlines of the downs, the drip of the showers among the beech leaves, the songs of the birds as they call from tree to tree. But I want to see the purple shadows on the hills where the pass winds down, watch a caravan creeping over the plain, stand in the orange-gardens in the evening, just beyond the City wall, and hear the students chattering over their books. I long for India when I am not with her."

"When my little girl went home," said Colonel Jansen, "her aunts asked her how she liked England. All she would say was, 'Well, you see it's different,' and looked about her in the pathetic, wistful way of a field-mouse who has lost his bearings. She could not explain it, but I am sure a strangeness and blankness struck at her soul. She could not love what she did not understand. She felt all we are saying now in a dull, inarticulate sort of way."

"It's what people describe as the call of the East, I suppose," said Mr. Turner heavily. He felt rather non-plussed by the conversation, and inclined for slumber. The sound of the water running, running from one marble tank to another was wonderfully soothing.

The mallie flitted across the stretch of sunshine into the belt of shade beyond, like some woodland creature who evades the haunts of men, and gives them a sort of tolerant attention before seeking his own fastnesses.

"How contented that man must be," said Daisy. "He appears to me the most light-hearted individual I have ever come across! The way he saunters along as if time didn't exist makes me happy; so unlike the determined forging ahead of the man with a purpose."

"Yet you wouldn't admire Harry if he tucked a rose behind his ear, hummed through his nose, and simply smiled when you asked him to hurry."

"Because it wouldn't be natural," said Daisy quickly. "With him it would be a pose—the most unattractive thing on earth."

"I don't think we should add to our charms by allowing others to see us as we really are," said Colonel Jansen. "We must keep up a sort of mask—at least convention demands it."

"That's what civilisation has taught us," said Mr. Turner heavily.

"A poor lesson, I think," said Jane, "which it will take us ages to unlearn. I think the most attractive sight on earth is a really natural person—not the superficial kind, who are as common as daisies—who delight in home-truths and everything, but the really sincere."

"Would you really like it, Jane? I wonder," said Daisy, peeping from under the brim of her hat. "Wouldn't you call them undisciplined and raw? I think I hear you say it."

"I should be attracted. I always am by anything genuine. Whether you like it or not you realise you're up against something real."

"I never pretend," said Sybil quietly.

Jane felt that she was right. As she sat there with her fingers pulling idly at the grass, her eyes absent and dreamy, and as empty of the sparkle of coquetry as eyes could be, no one could have accused her of an effort to appear other than she was. She gave a rather detached effect, that of a person whose thoughts and interests are far away, who only gives to her company a sort of tolerant indifference.

All through the afternoon she had hardly glanced at Harry. She had only paid him the most casual attention. Beneath the brim of her wide white hat her eyes looked soft and abstracted. For a moment Jane wondered in what region were her thoughts wandering, what interest absorbed her attention? What made the presence of her companions irksome to her? She felt certain that Sybil would have much

preferred to be alone. If she could have spent the hours without the burden of their talk she would have caught at it. She did not wish to join in it, or even listen to it. She wanted to be free from the strain of their company and indulge in some weird mental ramble of her own. The quiet patience of her voice showed how near she was to an exhibition of annoyance.

"Certainly prigs are the most unattractive race that human nature can devise," said Colonel Jansen thoughtfully."

"And yet we are all so dangerously near them," said Jane.

"Jane, Jane, what heresy."

"My dear, you know it yourself. If a prig is a person who feigns qualities he doesn't really possess, which are the outcome of no hidden spring, but only the outward appearance of them, then we've all come very close to it. If you don't admit it you're deceiving one person very grievously—yourself."

"And out of that mire the stepping-stones are very cunningly concealed."

Mr. Turner felt a great desire for sleep, but there was one thing he wished to say before he indulged it.

"People who think about themselves all day are the best at that."

Jane looked at him in some surprise.

"You're right, Bob, I'm sure," she said. "Intro-spective people who dissect every sentiment till there's nothing left to dissect are the greatest self-deceivers."

"Things they won't tolerate in others thrive in themselves, like bindweed in a bed of strawberries. I suppose it is the penalty for too much criticism. Their own faults are just out of focus."

CHAPTER X

JANE leant up against the edge of the stonework. A sort of lethargy seemed to have fallen upon her. Colonel Jansen's voice ceased suddenly. It seemed ages ago since he had been speaking.

Some tiny white stars had fluttered from the jasmine bushes, and hurried over the grass before a passing breeze. A rose near by fell heavily, and lay in a profusion of petals. The chenars rustled softly, then settled down into a great stillness.

Jane felt that she too, like Bob, wearied of their introspective conversation. She did not wish to discuss problems or talk. Any argument seemed strangely out of place. She wanted to listen to the sounds about her, watch the shadows, inhale the fragrance, bathe herself in the gold of the sunshine. She looked at a floating marigold that was being swept along by the water with an intent interest. In a minute it would fall into the tank and disappear. She followed it with absorption till it passed from sight.

The mallee, little suspecting that he had been the cause of the sahib-logues' conversation, drifted by and took up his position in a corner of the garden. Another picnic-party rowed up to the steps by the water, then away again, on catching sight of the English people.

Jane's mind slipped back into the past, with the backward bound of a boomerang. The hot sunshine, the heavy air, the scents from the flowers, the gentle splashing of the water seemed to enwrap her like a garment, fold her in, till she appeared to herself to be separated from the outside world, and could only think of the garden. It seemed to her almost

like a living person, demanding thought and consciousness ; an envious master who would brook the presence of no rival.

She watched the balconies of the palace with a half expectation of seeing some purdah beauty appear on them ; some creature with tinkling anklets and floating gauzes, with a wreath of jasmine or marigold entwined in her hair, who had watched for her lover all through the long, hot hours.

How those women's eyes must have swept the Lake for the sight of a boat, looked towards Srinagar, tried to pierce the mists of evening as they gathered round the shores. Then perhaps suddenly it had shot out from among the floating gardens, swung along by the boatmen who cried as they changed stroke, through the weeds and water-lilies to the palace by the water. Then they had wandered through the gardens, crooning soft love-songs, watched the roses quiver as the evening breeze from the Lake stirred their heavy heads, saw the stars peep out over the mountains, and the moonlight make broad roadways over the water. They had wandered up and down the grassy paths, listening for the notes of the bulbul in the thickets, hearing the petals fluttering softly, the gentle splash of the water as it trickled from the fountains.

Had the people who dwelt here been cruel, relentless, callous ? Had they pushed aside every obstacle which had arisen in the path of their pleasures, pursued the will-o'-the-wisp of fancy wheresoever it had led, stifled the voice of humanity till it had fainted in the darkness ? What scenes had the walls of the palace looked down upon. Had passion and despair and desolation walked here in the garden, companioned perhaps by treachery and deceit ? And their thoughts—on what had they dwelt ? On the lovely things of nature, the broad surface of the Lake, the calm mountains, the far-off peaks in the distance, which caught and held the setting sun ? Did they now ever look back from

some far-off region of the spirit, with infinite remorse or longing ?

Presently the mallie began to sing to himself, as he sat crouched up in a corner. Jane could hardly believe that the strange little cadences and soft notes could come from the huddled figure in the shadows, who rocked himself gently as he sang. He seemed to be chanting with a strange detachment, to be as utterly oblivious of their presence as an eagle would be hovering in the blue. As she listened to him she became conscious of one conclusion. The halls of the garden house were not empty to him. The paths among the grass terraces, the summer-houses in the corners were not desolate. He saw no sadness where others saw it. He had companionship where the passers-by would see loneliness.

He knew. Yes, he knew. Jane realised it at last. Where her eyes had caught a glimpse, his had a long, uninterrupted vision. Her ear might catch a note, he heard no other sound. For him the picnic parties, the idle sightseers, who came and went, were like the shadows flitting over the grass. His companions were those who did not go, or having gone did not rest till they returned. The advent of the globe-trotter, the idle curiosity, the vapid laughter of the women who came to stare—what were they ? Surely as little a thing as a wave that rolls and breaks, and is flung back again into the waters.

As she listened she was conscious of a curious sense of companionship with him. He and she seemed suddenly alone in this eastern garden, barricaded off from the others by some intangible barrier. Bob, Colonel Jansen, Harry, seemed at that moment to her, vague unrealities, shadows. The mallie's very detachment seemed to accentuate the difference. Surely he and she were living in some crucial stage of existence, the others in the present only ; and she felt for them a vague pity, as for those who have discarded the real for the unreal.

Was he, too, conscious of it, she wondered? She felt she would have given a good deal to know. Did she stand out in his mind with any distinction? Or was she merely one of the mem-sahibs who came and went, whose laughter, perhaps, vexed him a little, but who passed from his thoughts directly their boat had swung out away from the landing steps? Did he know, in some dim recess of consciousness, that she, too, had looked long and deeply into the mystery of the past?

But no voice whispered an answer to Jane's questionings. The rose-petals fluttered and fell, another marigold dropped into the fountain and was borne away, the sunshine paled. The palace house seemed wrapped in stillness. The shadows crept nearer to it, up to its balconies and trellises, on into its halls and courts.

A figure appeared at one of the arched doorways, misty, in white draperies. It was a woman, slender, elusive. As Jane watched her she began to move over the grass with the faint tinkle of an anklet. She stopped for a little, looking steadily at the group on the grass, then came on again with soft, undulating movements, nearer and nearer, like a shadow that slips away before the coming of the sun.

Her face and head were covered, a little sprig of jasmine fluttered between her fingers, the folds of her sari, as it clung about her, seemed like the mists which hover in the distances as evening settles down.

As she passed in front of the group on the grass she paused. Then, lifting one slender hand, she drew back her veil, and bending forward looked long and earnestly at Harry, with a sort of abandonment of tenderness. She never spared a glance for the others. It was at him, and him only, that she gazed with that intentness and absorption.

The face was young, but the eyes. . . . In them lay all the knowledge of the ages. All the passions, the sorrows, the storms, that ever tossed a human soul, seemed written in them. In her glance there was witchery, some subtle lure,

fascination. But it was not this that made Jane start up with a half-stifled cry ; it was not even that that look had been fixed on Harry unwaveringly, intently.

It was that the face of the woman was the face of Mrs. Jansen.

Jane started up. Sybil lay on the grass with closed eyes, her dark hair fluttering across her forehead, a long, white, graceful figure.

“ Where did the woman go ? ” asked Jane blankly.

“ What woman ? There was no woman. You have been sleeping, dear,” said Daisy gently. “ So has Mrs. Jansen. She has been sleeping too. I wonder if you have been dreaming together ! ”

CHAPTER XI

ONE evening Mr. Turner returned from a walk with a rather grave face.

"I've just met Jansen, and they've had bad news about that boy of theirs."

Jane's sympathies were aroused at once.

"Not very bad I hope?"

"Where is he?" asked Harry.

"At a school at home. He's a delicate little fellow with precious little stamina. They may have a cable later, but they think it will have to be an operation."

"Oh, poor, poor things," said Jane pitifully "I can't bear to think of them. If it had been Guy, Bob. What should we do?"

"It was Guy once," said Mr. Turner, remembering some bad hours.

"I remember, as if it were yesterday—every moment seemed an hour. Then the relief—the unutterable relief of hearing he was all right."

"Is he the only one?" asked Daisy.

"There's a little girl, exactly like her father, with grave blue eyes, and a general air of making the best of things."

"When did they know?"

"This morning."

"And are waiting to hear again?"

Mr. Turner pursed up his lips and wrinkled his forehead.

"The next news may be more reassuring."

"Yes—but the time in between."

"That's got to be got through somehow."

Tears welled up into Jane's eyes.

"I am grieved for them—so grieved. I shall leave her alone—as I should wish to be left myself—but just write a little note. No, Daisy, I won't come out for a row. I feel too sad myself. I remember little Mark in Sherpore before he was sent home, a dear, wistful little thing, with his mother's eyes. I have letters to write—I may take a stroll by myself presently."

Daisy sat on with her till the men had sauntered off, and pulled her chair more deeply into the shade. She lay back in it, and clasping her hands behind her head, gazed up into the trees with an air of deep absorption. She seemed to find the answer to some problem in the dark mass of green above. Then she sat up suddenly, and began to collect some of the chenar leaves which lay at her feet, with the tip of her parasol.

"Pretty things," she said, laying them on the palm of her hand. "I don't wonder that the Cashmeris introduce them and the winding curves of the river into all their work."

Jane assented absently.

"Look at these points! Could anything be more delicate, more sharp and clear? And when autumn comes what must it be like?"

"Or spring among the orchards."

"Or winter with all these mountains clothed in snow?"

Daisy watched Jane quietly, then she said suddenly:

"Do you know, something has just struck me. I thought of it first when we were all talking together. Now I am as certain of it as that I sit here. You're not sorry about Mrs. Jansen's little boy, Jane, you're glad. Yes, you needn't look so startled. I mean it—that's the exact way to describe what you are feeling now."

"Not sorry—glad? Then I must, indeed, be inhuman. What can you mean, dear?"

"You are glad of an opportunity to be sorry—that is about it. Oh, yes, I feel quite sure of it. You have been

struggling with a sort of dislike of Mrs. Jansen. You haven't let it grow without a good fight, but it has gained ground very surely. Now it is all swept away in a genuine feeling of sympathy, and you are glad—so glad—at its disappearance. I don't think you have known it yourself."

Mrs. Turner laid down her pen and looked steadily in front of her. She knew she could not meet Daisy's eyes just then. She felt as if she had been looking into a mirror. But everyone does not care to look into a mirror. It is not a diversion one chooses unless one is consciously at one's best. A feeling of guilt and apprehension stole over her. "Why do you say that? I've hardly seen her since we've been up here. I may have mentioned her a few times, but not often. I . . . I don't care for discussing *people* in these surroundings."

"Still, Jane, you know it. Oh, yes, you can pretend, and it might take in . . . your husband . . . but not me. My dear, how can you argue? It's true."

"I don't see . . ." Jane began again doubtfully.

"Oh, you do—you do."

Jane faced her suddenly. It would be better to talk than to think it all over presently in the dark, when the camp was still, and only the trees rustled. She didn't want to lie awake to-night. She didn't wish to be troubled by thoughts which would return.

"Perhaps. . . . Well, yes, perhaps it is true," she admitted quietly.

"The illness of her little boy is such a human thing," went on Daisy. "However one disliked a woman, one couldn't resist it—then. And you are grateful to it. It brings her again into the range of your sympathy. You don't like disliking anyone, Jane—you're not that kind—it goes very much against the grain. And then you're glad when they do something—or something is done—which wipes it away."

"I believe you're right, my dear. I must be a very transparent person," said Jane wearily.

"I'm interested, you see," said Daisy slowly, and she began to shred the chenar leaves into tiny pieces.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Doesn't that sharpen one's eyes?"

"Oh, don't be foolish," Jane answered with sudden impatience, "and fanciful. That's what you are—fanciful. It's all absurd."

"There's still one thing we haven't settled."

"What's that?"

"Just why you don't like her."

Jane did not move. She felt suddenly that she had been brought to a crossing of the ways. She had been sauntering idly down a path, now she must decide which turn to take.

"Why, why?" repeated Daisy softly. "That's what I've been wondering for so many days now. Of course, I knew in Sherpore that she wasn't a *friend*, but you had a sort of protective feeling for her. You didn't like to hear her laughed at, or speculated about. Now all that is changed. You positively dislike her. No, you've not said one word against her. In a way it goes too deep for that. The people we talk against aren't the ones we really dread."

"Perhaps she has let something loose upon us," said Jane very slowly. "Opened some door it is better to keep shut. Invited something we ought to hold back."

Her words sounded to her own ears momentous, significant. She regretted them almost as soon as they were spoken. They seemed to her full of apprehension, filled with a meaning she had never meant to express.

"Whatever do you mean?" Daisy asked.

She kept silence. A shiver passed through the poplar grove, stirring the leaves, passing on over the field of maize, towards the village.

"Tell me, Jane. You must."

"Don't press me, my dear," Jane answered wearily.

"I am not very clear—but that's what I feel—dimly. But to-day I had forgotten it all. The boy seemed a sort of link that joined us together again."

"I see," said Daisy uneasily; and she began again to collect the chenar leaves which lay about her. "I think I see. Now go on with your writing. I disturbed you. No, Jane, lay your pen down. I must ask you. Has it ever struck you that Harry . . ."

"Good gracious, no," Mrs. Turner answered vigorously. "Whatever makes you think of that?"

"How did you know what I was going to say?"

"Perhaps I see your thoughts, as you do mine," she said evasively. "Your husband has eyes for one person only—yourself. Never forget it—don't persuade yourself otherwise. Keep your mind fixed on that, Daisy," she went on earnestly.

"Yes, but in Sherpore . . ."

"D'ye think I'd ever have consented to your engagement unless I'd been quite certain?" asked Jane. "If you'd watched that affair as I did, you'd know what I mean. It was one-sided from the very first. I don't believe he even saw it. You said so yourself that day we were driving back from Mrs. Taylor's. At the time, I confess, it was that which made me angry—the utter waste, his unconsciousness, her suffering."

"Yes, yes, I know. But lately it has struck me perhaps we were mistaken."

"A man like Harry," went on Jane earnestly, "never notices a woman who is not his type. You are—Sybil Jansen is not, and never will be. He doesn't care for all the arts she paraded before him, the little snares that ought to have trapped him. Do you think he even saw the red rose she had in her hair the evening we dined with the Jacksons? He was far more intent upon the pink frills of your dress. She may have spent an hour arranging and rearranging it, and in one second he had passed it over. He was yours the

first moment he saw you. It would take her a month of scheming to attract even his attention. You ought to know it beyond a shadow of doubt."

"Yes—I ought."

"Never speak to me like this again. Don't think it even to yourself. Don't you see it's foolish and unreasonable . . . and—and ungrateful?"

The torn pieces of chenar leaf fluttered through Daisy's fingers.

"But not again, dear Jane," she cried, laughing. "Not again now you have destroyed my foolish fears. How stable you are and well-balanced! I must seem like a reed to you, swayed by every wind."

"Never think of it again, Daisy," repeated Jane earnestly. "Be sure never to let it cross your mind again."

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That evening Jane went for a little stroll by herself. She felt she needed the quiet fields bathed in sunset light, the waving blades of the maize, the gentle shade of the willows by the river-path. She even stopped a little near the village, and watched some babies kicking in the dust, the slow pounding of the corn, the return of the herdsmen. The sights and sounds soothed and quieted her. She did not wish to return to the camp until it was time to dress for dinner. She would not even allow her thoughts to rest upon her conversation with Daisy. It belonged to the class of disquieting things, tiresome thoughts that recurred. She thought resolutely of the scenery before her, the dark shadow that was creeping up from the sides of the hills, that one dazzling peak in the distance that had caught all the brightness of the sunset, the haze that had begun to cloud the Lake, making it mysterious and dim. She watched the lights creep out, one by one, little points of brightness at long intervals along the banks. Then one star shone from the clear green sky, above the mountain's edge. It seemed

the most absorbing thing in all creation. Then another—and another—till it was all alight.

She suddenly realised that she was near the Jansens' camp, must pass quite near to regain her own in time. The lamps were lit, and already strange buzzing things hovered near them. Pallid streaks of light radiated out into the darkness.

She found that she had come nearer to it than she imagined. She could see dimly the servants moving about near the cook-house, and the bearer hurrying to the living-tent, the dull light of the lamp on the dining-table.

She found herself tripping over a rope, and saw that she was quite close to a tent pitched a little way from the others. From its door there came a faint glow. The flap swayed gently and a shaft of light shone out.

Jane turned to go, but glanced round as she heard a faint rustling behind her. She could not have prevented herself from that backward glance for anything. That soft movement and fluttering seemed to force her to look and see what caused it.

Sybil Jansen was standing inside. Her tall graceful figure was slightly bent. She seemed to be looking at something before her in an absorbed, intent sort of way. Then she drew back and straightened herself up, lifted her arms, and with quick, clever fingers wound some glittering thing in her hair.

It mattered—somehow Jane felt it without a doubt. Whether the long shining green string, or the pale, dull yellow beads were to be worn, was of intense interest to her. Her whole being was concentrated on the decision as to which of them was to adorn her. Every movement of her slender neck and her small dark head showed her absorption. Then she gave a soft sigh of contentment, and drew back again. She had decided—she would wear the yellow beads to-night.

Jane stepped back quickly into the darkness. It seemed

to her friendly and sheltering. She wished earnestly that she had never left it, nor obeyed the attraction of the lamp. She was conscious that, for a moment, she pressed her hands to her eyes, as though to shut out a sight she dreaded.

She had seen Sybil Jansen before her looking-glass, intent upon her toilet. It had mattered to her, at that moment, whether each dark strand of her hair had given just the right effect, if the folds of her dress had harmonised with the glittering string.

But it was not that she had seen a pretty woman putting the finishing touches to herself that sent Jane stumbling back through the darkness to her tent. It was not that she was conscious of having intruded and pried, or that the blackness of the night had closed round her, making her path dim and uncertain. It was that, at that moment as she looked at Mrs. Jansen, she had had such a vision of callousness presented to her that struck her like some physical cold. Sybil had, in that moment of unconsciousness, revealed herself. She had shown a depth Jane had never even guessed at. As she swayed before the mirror she had been full of joy. The gaiety of the woman who adorns herself and approves the result had possessed her. The simple wreathing of her hair, the final adjustment of her dress, the finishing touch of the chain had all been to her significant, tremendous. Behind the light movements of her white fingers, the dainty shifting of this lace and that, had lain a purpose. It was no perfunctory care, or casual interest, and it showed a shallowness that appalled the watcher.

Jane felt as if her warm rush of pity, when she had heard of the illness of Sybil's boy, had been suddenly frozen and congealed at its source, almost as if her own maternal love had received a deadly mortal blow. While Sybil's husband and her friends were only feeling tenderness and sorrow for her, the real woman had remained untouched, unmoved. Beneath the lowered eye and sad appearance

there really lay a profound indifference. The news that made Colonel Jansen go about all day anxious and careworn, that had softened Jane, and made the sunshine like an offence, had only penetrated the outer crust of this woman's feeling. Beneath it there lay a being alert, vital, who cared intensely, but not for the normal things of life. She was untouched by the joys and sorrows that should have moved her. She was apart—in a curious solitude of her own.

Jane went back to her camp unhappily, heavily. She hardly heard the frogs croaking, or the faint song of a boatman far out on the Lake. A fluttering bat brushed against her, but she barely heeded it. She had begun to wonder . . . and wonder.

CHAPTER XII

ONE day as Jane was returning to the camp, she became conscious of a sense of commotion and stir about it. The servants were collected before Mr. Turner, who stood in the middle with a Cashmeri herdsman. An outer circle of boatmen watched the scene from behind the trees.

As she drew nearer, she saw that her husband was stamping up and down among them ; his cheeks were puffy with anger, his eyes red round the rims. He was shouting hoarsely, in a voice she had never heard him use.

“ What is it, Bob ? What is the matter ? ” she asked as she came nearer to the group under the trees. The servants stood aside to let her through, then drew round again. “ Has anything been stolen ? What has happened ? ” she repeated anxiously.

“ Stolen ? What makes you say that ? Why should anything be stolen ? ”

“ There’s such a commotion going on—and every servant we have is listening. Why is this man here ? ”

It all came out by degrees. The sweeper who had charge of the dogs had lost one, he had wandered away to the village, and been brought back by a herdsman in hopes of reward.

“ But Tinker is here,” said Jane, patting him. “ He is all right. What harm has been done, Bob ? ”

He looked at her strangely, and she noticed that he still had that red look about the eyes.

“ Harm ? ” he began blusteringly. “ What do you mean ? ”

“ I thought at the least the cook-boat had broken loose, or the entire camp blown down.”

“Do I keep servants just for the sake of paying them wages? Are my dogs to wander all over the country, in and out of every squalid village, with every herdsman expecting a reward? They’re in league together. You’re an idiot if you can’t see it.”

“I can see a lot of fuss over nothing.”

“It’s a put-up thing,” went on Mr. Turner fiercely. “We lose the dog and he is found—could anything be simpler? And now I suppose you would like me to give the man a hundred rupees?”

“I should like to see you more like yourself.” Jane was unable to keep her amazement out of her voice. “A trifling reward will be enough—only, don’t make such a scene.”

“Scene?” he shouted. “Can’t you see that they’ve made it up together? But they’ve reckoned without me—that much is certain.”

“Well, settle it as you like, only don’t shout. You’ll rouse every camp for miles round. I quite expect to have messages sent asking what has occurred.”

Mr. Turner’s anger seemed suddenly to pass, like a gust of wind that shakes the trees, rustles the branches, raises the dust, and leaves behind it a great stillness. The flush faded from his face, he stopped walking up and down, he even patted Tinker’s head.

“Well, well, as you say, he’s been brought back. But next time it happens, the sweeper goes.”

The servants melted away, and whispered in their quarters, the Cashmeri tramped off in the direction of his village, contented with his backsheesh. Mr. Turner sat down under the trees, as though nothing had happened, the dogs crept up and licked his hand. The khitmutghar began laying the table for dinner, the clink of the cooking-pots came from the khansamah’s corner. Everything resumed its normal course in the camp under the chenars—but one thing remained.

After fifteen years of married life, Bob Turner had surprised his wife. His sudden, irrational burst of anger had disturbed her strangely. In that moment, as he had stood surrounded by the servants, he had shown her a side of himself—an ungoverned, undisciplined side—which she had never known, and the sight of it had left her with a feeling of blankness. She had often seen him annoyed before, irritated to the limit of endurance. There had been the evening the gharry was late when they were dining with the General, the time Mrs. Larcombe had been rude to herself, a dozen occasions she could think of, but always with a difference. They had no more resembled the scene of this afternoon than a fluster of wind which arises suddenly from no one knows where, is like a storm which hurries up from the distance and breaks gradually, deluging the earth.

As she took off her outdoor clothes, and put on the dress she was accustomed to wear every evening, she almost felt that she was performing the office for a stranger. Could it really be she—Jane Turner—who had just witnessed an outburst of rage on the part of her husband? She put aside the bracelet that he had given her when they were engaged, that she had told the ayah to put out for her. She had meant to wear it to-night, as just this time of year he had bought it for her, with the engagement-ring. She had never worn it without a feeling of tenderness creeping over her. It was, to her, as dear as Guy's little first golden curl, and the sprig of blackened orange-blossom from her wedding wreath. She had never worn it without a stirring of the heart, a sense of deep, satisfied content. No—she could not wear it to-night. It revived memories which somehow hurt her strangely. The sight of it gave her an additional pang. When she looked at it she remembered so vividly the pride with which he had clasped it on her arm. Then she had put it on at the first dinner-party they had given. There had been long waits between the courses, nerve-shattering pauses, and she knew she had wrenched it round and round

her wrist, with the restless fingers of a young hostess. It seemed twisted in and out of her married life, as if it had become welded into it. Bob had given her many presents since, but none that she valued half as much as this one. Lately she had become conscious of a strange reluctance to wear it. It had been a vague feeling floating somewhere among the shadows at the back of her mind, not defined or recognised, but starting from a train of thought that had started soon after they came to the Dhal.

So she did a thing she had never thought it possible she could do. She locked the funny, twisted little bracelet away, and put on her aunt's wedding-present, a massive gold band in which a sapphire winked and shone.

As she sat opposite to him at dinner that night, she glanced at him uneasily once or twice, and his attitude surprised her almost as much as the scene of the afternoon. All moodiness had passed away; he was chatting and laughing with Daisy, really exerting himself to amuse her, and telling anecdote after anecdote.

It all seemed the stranger to Jane. Had he not really been annoyed about the dog? Could it be that he had vented upon the unfortunate sweeper the moment's inclination to anger? Was it possible that an hour ago this genial, attentive host had been bullying his servants, shouting at his wife, blaming everyone indiscriminately? This sudden amiability seemed to her more disquietening than his anger. His hearty laugh jarred on her. She had a feeling as of being shut out. Had he more surprises in store for her? Had she never known him, or suddenly been confronted by a stranger? He rallied her once or twice on her silence.

"Come, Jenny, what's amiss? Didn't you enjoy your walk?"

"Yes, oh yes," she answered absently.

"You are not over-tired?"

"Oh no—I didn't go far enough for that."

“Daisy and I are the only cheery ones of the party. Harry or you seem to have caught the blues and handed them on to each other. If we left it to you, the conversation would die.”

Jane did not answer. There did not appear to her to be anything to be said. She let Bob begin again on his favourite story, which she had never listened to before without a smile. She turned away, and looked across at the Jansens' dinner-lamp which glimmered redly in the distance. In its uncertain light she could even see the white-coated khitmutghar moving about under the trees, bringing dishes from the cook-house, passing quickly in and out of the shadows.

She looked across at Harry, and found his eyes had been resting on the same object. He had been following the movements of that distant servant while Bob had been telling his story, and Daisy laughing at the point. Somehow the discovery added to her discomfort.

“Now then, Jenny, don't be such a spoil-sport,” went on Mr. Turner with masculine tactlessness. “Don't you like other people to be merry when you're dull? Is that it? Are we all to sit mum till you find a word to throw at us? Must we give way to your mood? That's the worst of a woman,” he added with a touch of malice, “you've all got to dance to her piping!”

Was this really Bob's voice that she heard? For a moment she doubted it. She looked at him in dumb amazement. Were those the eyes that had always appeared to her the kindest upon earth, narrowed to two slits, hardened by some indescribable expression? Why did he watch her with that cold, critical look? Had he changed, or she . . . ? Had his former solicitude been all a farce; was this the real man whom she had discovered? Was her trouble, her vexation not merely of no moment to him, but a subject for sport and comment?

“If we're too noisy for you why sit here?” he went

on sharply. "My good Jane, have a little pity. It's precious depressing for us to have . . . Hullo!"

To her horror, two slow, bitter tears forced themselves into her eyes, overbrimmed, and fell into her lap. She knew that a hundred others were ready to take their places. She felt incapable of any effort to stop them. Such a thing had never happened before while she sat at the head of any table. She had never suffered so complete a loss of self-control, felt so utter a weariness.

Without listening to Bob's jeering words and angry laugh she got up and went to her tent.

CHAPTER XIII

JANE went to bed early that night, but she could not sleep. A strange apprehension lay over her spirit. She had listened to Bob's laughter and Daisy's clear tones for some time, and had half expected that he would come to her tent with an inquiry as to how she felt. He did not come, but had sat on and on under the trees, then gone to bed whistling cheerily, and she heard his camp bed creak noisily as he threw himself upon it. His behaviour had hurt her strangely. She had felt indescribably wounded at his rough laughter, his indifference—but it was not this that made her lie awake and watch the moonlight flicker through her tent-door. It was not his jeering laughter nor sharp words, which drove all thought of sleep away, and made her toss and turn in her narrow bed. It was rather the strangeness of it all, the shock of finding herself in circumstances which she not only did not understand, but which chilled and frightened her. The unusualness of it all struck her with a sense of dismay.

She remembered suddenly Bob's look of criticism soon after they came to the Dhal. Then she had not cared—she had been wrapped in dreams of her own. Now she looked back to it as a starting-point. She had never been a pretty woman, and had given very little thought to it. Now she was conscious of it, and felt that he was too. She was frightened—very frightened. He had often looked at her like that since that day, and the expression in his eyes turned her cold. She frequently detected him indulging in a long stare which held very little kindness in it. She felt sometimes that she must hide from those blue eyes that once expressed for her so complete a comprehension.

Thoughts were stirring in his mind in which she had no part or share. And they were strange, hard, resentful ones, which once would have found no lodgment there at all. Sometimes they kept in the background, and she was only conscious of a great aloofness, sometimes—like to-night—they looked through his eyes, spoke with his voice, were obvious in his expression. His mind was no longer the open book she once had loved so well. She felt that in it now were pages she would dread to turn. The vague fear that had lately haunted her, now flaunted itself before her in dreadful boldness. Bob was changing—and she could do nothing. She could not understand nor stay the forces that were working in him. He had slipped beyond her control and—she trembled as she acknowledged it to herself—her love. He had passed into a region every instinct told her was very cold and chill.

She put up her hand and felt the tent wall. It seemed to her, at that moment, like her life closing round her, hemming her in, isolating her in a curious, intangible sort of way. She felt oppressed and weighted down, filled with a sense of depression which she was powerless to lift.

She got up and lit a match. Her watch said it was just three—she had lain awake for hours, preyed on by restless thoughts. The frogs croaked raucously in the marshy ground. She slipped on a coat, and pulling aside the flap of her tent, stepped out on to the grass.

Dark clouds were drifting over the moon, making inky shadows across the camp. The trees were silhouetted sharply against the sky. The faintest breeze had sprung up, and fluttered the leaves as though they were stirred by an unseen hand. Some flying creature brushed against her, then off again into the thick, hot darkness, with a whir of wings.

Jane sat down at her tent door, and began to think again with restless, feverish activity. Yes—some change was working in Bob, and she could not put her finger upon it.

She could not say that it lay exactly in this or that, but more in an altered demeanour, a difference that struck her every hour of the day. Sometimes lately he had appeared to her almost cruel, to exult in saying the things that most would wound her, to tease her beyond the limit of endurance. He still blundered as ever, but whereas once he had been the kindest of men, who would not willingly give pain to any creature, he now appeared callous. He rounded on her daily, stung her by his careless words, his utter neglect. Were all the years to be like this? Had their comradeship faded utterly away, leaving a middle-aged couple tied together by no bond of liking or affection? Was it for this that she had endured many hot weathers by his side, forced herself to pay attention to social duties, laid herself out to please and entertain his seniors?

She thought of him as he had driven up to the hotel door in Murree so many years ago, impatient at delay, begrimed with dust, eager to tell her that he had missed her. How he had chafed at her hesitations and pretended reluctance, over-borne her with his own impatience, carried her along in the stream of his earnestness. Then she remembered their early married life, with its ups and downs, and separations, and happy comradeship, his delight when her first book had been taken, his anger at a carping review. And now it had all ended in this. . . . She had fled from the dinner-table, unable to endure his gibes, the criticism in his eyes, the coldness of his tones. And he had sought no reconciliation, he was sleeping a few yards away from her, as soundly as was his custom. He either had not seen how he had wounded her, or, seeing, did not care.

In a curious way, as she thought of it, this trouble seemed to link itself on to others. She had felt troubled lately, apprehensive. Why? She had hardly even told herself. Now she knew that her husband's changed behaviour, Daisy's growing restlessness, and its curious, disturbing cause, had created an atmosphere of disquietude. In

Sherpore they had been four ordinary, normal people—she and Bob seasoned wayfarers along the path of matrimony, Daisy and Harry young lovers starting on its road. Now a feeling of suspicion appeared to have settled down upon them. They seemed like aliens only united by proximity and circumstance. The bond of union seemed wearing very thin, and they chaffed and fretted at it.

She sat very still, looking fixedly before her. The darkness seemed impenetrable. The breeze had died away, and the calm it had left behind seemed almost uncanny in its quietude.

Presently she thought she heard a sound down by the water's edge, a soft, stealthy movement which stopped suddenly. She listened intently but heard nothing. She thought it must be the throbbing of her own heart. Then it came again . . . and again. Some one was stirring in the camp, Some one, like herself, was alert and widely awake, moving quietly about, then stopping, starting again, filled with restless activity. She drew her coat closer about her, and went forward a few steps. She could hear Bob talking in his sleep, tossing about uneasily. One of the dogs, growling softly, slipped out and walked by her side.

Suddenly the cloud passed from the face of the moon, and the whole camp lay before her as though in clearest daylight. The stars looked down searchingly upon the earth; the water glittered with the brightness of a sheet of glass; the poplar grove, like a row of sentinels, stood out against the sky, grim and unbending.

Jane stopped suddenly, then slipped behind a tree.

On the little beach, down by the water's edge, Harry was standing. They were his footsteps that she had heard.

But it was not that he stood there at dead of night, looking out at the other camp, which sent that chill of fear through Jane. It was not that he must have crept down stealthily,

had paced up and down a hundred times or more, was conscious of nothing. It was that in his aspect there was something so remote, so intense, that he seemed separated from the rest of the world. He appeared totally absorbed in that silent watch. Sometimes he turned and strode up and down restlessly, but it made Jane think of an animal who paces before the bars of his cage. Then he stood again, in that terrible, detached way, his head a little sunk, his arms folded. She wondered if he would have heard if she had shouted at him. He seemed apart from her and the outside world.

She slipped back to her tent, and crouched down under the bedclothes. She called every argument to her aid that she could think of. It was natural for people to wander about at night. What could be more soothing than to take a turn by the water's edge, and catch any air that might be stirring? She knew, even as she repeated the phrases to herself, that it was all of no use.

Suddenly her thoughts reverted to the woman who lay sleeping a few hundred yards away. The same breeze that had stirred her own tent-door was playing among the dark strands of her hair. The stars that looked down so pitilessly upon Jane were watching Mrs. Jansen as she lay at rest. The same scents were floating up to her, she could hear the faint sounds of awakening life, the pale glow in the east that was beginning to spread slowly upwards was shining for them both. She had hardly thought of her, since, two days after the first news, she had heard of the recovery of her little boy. The scene in the tent, as she dressed for dinner, was too vividly in her mind. Somehow, as she remembered her absorption, and the long, glittering string of shining beads, her mind recoiled. She could not bring herself to dwell upon it. It presented to her so terrible a picture of strangeness.

Jane struck at the pole of her tent with a sudden fierceness. What was this power that Sybil possessed, that had

made Harry turn away from his wife of a few weeks? How had she made him watch for her footsteps, lay in wait for her shadow? Where had she stolen the charm that was drawing him to her, where had she learnt the way to fascinate and enthrall him? In the depth of some jungle, on some glacier height among the snow-covered crests, in the vista of some pine forest deep among its purple shadows? Or in some marble hall, among the fountains, in some heavy-scented garden within earshot of the swish of waters as they lap against the landing-steps. What fairy had whispered this trick of enchantment into her ear? Jane remembered, with dismay, how often, lately, Harry would walk up and down the dusty path which led to the village. Was it not because she very often passed that way? He pretended at first that he wanted to sketch the glimpse of the Lake that could be had from there, and Daisy would sit beside him, under her sun-umbrella, chattering gaily. But lately he had not pretended—he had dropped all pretence. He would wait until his wife was settled under the trees, and would slip off by himself. He had not even troubled to give an explanation, he had drifted beyond the need of it. Instinctively Jane felt that he did not care if every eye in the camp was upon him. She wondered how many nights he had watched the dawn from the little beach. How many times had he paced up and down, while they were sleeping in their tents?

And to-morrow he would join them at breakfast, with that curious look of apathy. He would take part in their doings, pull out the chairs to the shadiest spot, fetch books, whistle to the dogs—but always with that strange sense of remoteness about him. He would take part in their life as one of themselves. But—Jane realised it suddenly, with a shock of dismay—the *real* Harry was not the well-trained young man with the veneer of civilisation, but this absorbed, vital person striding up and down in the dark. That was the one who mattered, not the creature who appeared daily disguised in convention's trappings.

Surely there are two stages in our contact with an enemy ? First, before we know him for what he is, then when we recognise him and meet him in the open.

Jane had, in this night, met her trouble and looked into its eyes. Now she could go forward, knowing what she faced.

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT Jane had dreaded had come to pass: Daisy had entered the game. Inexperience and foolishness triumphantly joined hands, and tackled the problem with the blundering officiousness of beginners.

She had not only seen what was going on, but was determined to take a hand. She would not consent to remain in the inactivity that at least could have done no harm.

By what means her knowledge had come to her the elder woman did not know. Perhaps some little incident, trivial in itself, had given the clue, which she had followed up to its ultimate conclusion. That her husband was drifting away from her was clear to Daisy's eyes. That she meant to make every effort to keep him was equally obvious.

Instinctively she connected the change with Mrs. Jansen. Although on the few occasions she had ever seen her with Harry she had noticed no sign that could be seized upon by a jealous woman, she laid his altered demeanour at her door. With a steady instinct, and total absence of logic, she was convinced of it, and no arguments could have moved her from it.

She knew that Harry no longer delighted in her presence, that he often schemed to get away from her, to cut short the hours they spent together, but if she had been asked exactly why she thought so, she could have made no answer. She could not remember any one incident that had revealed the state of his mind to her, but she knew that it no longer belonged to the region of uncertain things, but was to her one of the facts of existence.

Summer changes imperceptibly into autumn. It is

not possible to point at this or that day as the one when the dividing line is passed. Spring approaches softly, exchanging winter sunshine for a mild, pale radiance. The change comes about, and we know not how.

So had the alteration in Harry taken place ; gently, gradually. So had the knowledge stolen upon his wife. She had slowly become aware of it, not realised it suddenly with a shock of surprise.

He was changing—and Mrs. Jansen was the cause of it. So far Daisy's mind wandered down the path of apprehension. But she meant to stop it. She was not the sort who submit easily—so she told herself reassuringly. She might appear yielding, plastic ; in reality there lay a strong will behind the soft exterior. Other people, discerning, watchful observers could have told her she was the kind who hasten disaster, who, with well-intentioned blundering, set the seal upon their misfortunes. But she did not mean to ask anyone what they thought. The only opinion for which she felt real respect was her own.

Now when she got up in the morning it was with one intention. Harry's attention must be caught, arrested, held. He must be roused from his lethargy of indifference.

The day became filled for her with little things. The few words she wrung out of him in the morning, the petition that he would move her chair into a shadier spot, the occasional curt words he gave her, became the subject of her thoughts. She became watchful of him, conscious of his every movement, sensitive to his change of mood.

When Jane had watched her efforts for a little while, she became aware that the situation was now darker. If Daisy had only consented to remain passive things might have righted themselves. But in the moment that she had seen all, and decided upon her course of action, she had entered upon a career of hard obstinacy, as perverse as it was determined.

One afternoon Jane had ventured upon a hint.

"Dear child, it doesn't answer. You can't force things. Let it take its course. Be tactful."

"I must make an effort. I can't watch everything breaking up without trying to do something."

Daisy's eyes were hard and bright.

"Make your effort, but in the right direction."

"How?"

"Don't exact so much attention. It does no good. Be soft and gentle . . . yourself, in fact. You'll win through. You have always attracted Harry. This other is a digression . . . the result of a mood. It will pass."

"Believe me, you are trying the wrong way," went on Jane after a pause. "In Sherpore did you ever lift a finger to get him? No—you left that to Mrs. Jansen, and she failed—yes—failed."

"And now it's my turn."

"Not if you are wise."

"You don't understand what it all means to me?"

"Haven't I a husband?"

"Have you ever had to struggle to keep him?"

"I have had to manage him—I am trying to do it now."

"Has it answered?" asked Daisy. "In Sherpore—yes. But here? Hasn't he slipped a little *beyond* all that? It's different—here," she repeated softly, and looked out into the misty distances ahead.

"You're not happy with Mr. Turner now, Jane," she went on after a little. "I suppose my own experience has opened my eyes. D'ye think I don't see how you avoid him, how he hurts you? You don't like his laugh, you don't like his tone. No one would."

"Don't be absurd, child," said Jane almost angrily.

"Here are we, two wives coping with a problem," went on Daisy calmly. "You've been married fifteen years—I a few weeks; but we're much in the same position. Why

do you give advice to me? Don't you want it yourself? Why? Why?"

Jane shook her head dumbly.

"You know as little as I do—and yet you preach to me," Daisy went on passionately. "You're as befogged as I am—you're groping too. Why—I'd as soon ask the advice of that Cashmeri woman there, who's trailing along through the dust. She going to grind the corn and fetch the water . . . but perhaps . . . she understands. You see she's . . . of the place."

"What's that got to do with it?"

Daisy looked at Jane steadily.

"A great deal," she answered slowly. "Don't you see it? I feel as if I couldn't feel like this again away from here. Sometimes these mountains hemming one in, the expanse of water, that dark mass of walnut trees . . . and . . . the palace garden seem a part of what I endure. Oh, Jane, I must say it. You're an *idiot* if you don't feel it too. When the mallee sings over there, up and down the scale, then breaks off again, when the water laps against the banks, I feel it's all part of a whole. . . . It all fits in. It's no good."

"She could tell you what every woman's instinct tells her," said Jane, watching the woman plodding wearily towards the village. "What I'm telling you—the only conclusion of common sense. But you won't listen. She can't tell you more."

"She could—she could," cried Daisy, rocking herself backwards and forwards. "I tell you—she's of the place; not like us, new to it."

Daisy took Harry off to Srinagar later in the day. He went, but Jane knew it was because it would have been more trouble to refuse. They returned at tea-time, hot, tired, and weary-looking.

No sooner had they landed than Daisy began to chatter gaily of all they had done. They had been captured by

the La Touches, and had had to listen to the story about the American and the man who stuttered. They had also threatened to come out and see them on the Dhal.

"You didn't encourage it?" asked Mr. Turner anxiously.

"I painted it in the blackest colours," said Daisy.

"You don't think they'll come?"

"I should be surprised if they did, but a man who can tell a story like that might be capable..."

"That's right. Jane would have asked them here—pressed them to stay. 'So good of you to look us up. Mind you come again,'" mimicking her. "'Can't think why we've never met before.' Did you meet anybody else?"

"No one we knew. Oh! it was hot. Such a glare from the water, and the house-boats crowded together on the river! And the box-wallahs—we were allowed no peace, till Harry threatened to throw everything into the Jhelum."

"Why don't you remain quiet, instead of rushing about? That's the sure sign of a new-comer to the East," went on Mr. Turner crossly. "Rushing about and wearing every one out. Trying Western ways till you're laid up with fever. Besides—I've been alone the whole afternoon."

"Except for Jane," answered Daisy pertly.

"Oh yes, Jane's been here," said Mr. Turner, after a pause. "Jane's always here, isn't she? At least I suppose so, but she's not very conversational or amusing. You see I'm only a husband." He laughed suddenly, then relapsed into a heavy silence.

"When you were my age I expect you rushed about," said Daisy, undoing her veil and twisting it up with quick, spasmodic jerks. "Perhaps you don't remember..."

"It isn't so very long ago," he answered resentfully.

"You used to call my expeditions intelligence in Sherpore. But that's changed, hasn't it? It's stupidity here!"

"This isn't Sherpore," said Jane.

"Well done, Jane. An original point of view at last!"

This isn't Sherpore ! What more could we want ? There's penetration for you ! ”

“ Oh, do stop teasing her,” said Daisy sharply. “ It isn't—she's quite right. If only you'd see it. . . . ”

“ I want a rest from intelligence. ”

“ You've had a rest. I have a husband now at my disposal. I bombarded him to-day, I can tell you, but he doesn't waste much time in giving the answers. They err on the side of brevity, don't they, Harry ? ”

Captain Oakes did not answer. He pushed his chair a little further back to avoid a flicker of sunshine, and filled his pipe deliberately.

Daisy pretended not to notice his silence.

“ I shall never become well-informed,” she said. “ Isn't it the first thing you tell a child, to ask anything he doesn't know ? I do ask. If I'm only snubbed, how am I to attain to this knowledge which is so desirable in a wife ? ”

“ Don't chatter, Daisy,” said Mr. Turner crossly.

“ You would like me to be intelligent, Harry, wouldn't you—and not merely pretty ? ” she asked coquettishly, turning to her husband. “ People *do* think me pretty, you know. At home they always did, and I've filled out since then. The compliments I had when I came to Sherpore ! ”

“ I have always thought you pretty,” said her husband, looking at her smiling. “ Who could deny it ? ”

“ Oh, you used to think so ! But now—that's the question. And if you do think so it makes no difference. Why young Dacre used to say . . . ”

“ Nothing I wish to hear,” said Mr. Turner sulkily.

“ But Harry does ! ”

“ I am getting jealous.” Captain Oakes laughed softly.

“ You don't know what it means ! ”

“ But I am learning. ”

“ I don't believe a word of it ! ”

“ It's the case all the same. ”

“ Oh, Harry, if I only thought so,” cried Daisy ; and

she looked wistfully at him as though she would read the truth in his handsome, laughing face. "If I only could think it. You were once—that I do know. But now—oh! no. I can't believe it."

"The fact is you haven't much faith in your husband," he answered lightly.

"Is that my fault?"

"Oh! do stop bickering," cried Mr. Turner testily. "You neither of you will let a thing drop, that's what's the matter with you. It's incessant—this wrangling. That's what it is—wrangling."

But Daisy would not be silenced. She began again directly:

"Don't you remember the day we rode back along the circular road in the evening? You made some very pretty speeches then. You *can't* have forgotten. And the night we dined at the Taylors'! We got together in a corner and talked such nonsense. At least you did. You put things very prettily."

Harry made no answer, Mr. Turner grunted, Jane could think of nothing to divert the stream.

"There's been a shortage of them lately," Daisy went on. "You must start again or else . . . I'll ride and dance with young Dacre when we go back to the cantonment, and then you'll know what it means to look foolish. How people will laugh! They expect us to return a honeymooning couple. We've outgrown that stage rather quickly—a record, I should think. Mrs. Taylor will say . . . Oh! he's gone. I expect he's tired. I am, I know."

Mr. Turner whistled to the dogs, and went off through the trees with them at his heels, for his evening walk, while the two women sat on in the shade.

"It doesn't answer—you see it doesn't answer," said Jane quietly.

"It's all I can do," answered Daisy doggedly.

CHAPTER XV

I

ONE day the mail came in, and with it a letter to say that Guy had won a scholarship. Jane's heart swelled with maternal pride. As she read it she seemed to see the boy vividly before her, glowing with health, full of vitality, buoyant with good spirits.

She had hardly dared to think it possible that he would succeed when she had been told he was to try, had allowed herself to dwell on it as little as possible, had been almost annoyed at any sanguine opinion being expressed on the subject. She had disliked to hear Bob speculating on his chances, and latterly they had hardly mentioned it. Now she knew that she had wanted it beyond anything, had longed for this to happen. It added the touch of pride to her affection that seemed the crowning joy. It justified the expensive school, the holiday tutors, the heavy bills. It repaid her forethought and anxious plans, and it brightened the future.

She caught up a sun-umbrella and hurried off to meet her husband. He had gone off, after breakfast, for a stroll, and she soon caught sight of him coming towards her.

"What's up?" he asked shortly. "What are you here for?"

"I came to meet you. Oh, Bob, just listen. . . ."

"Is the camp blown down?"

"No, no. Why should it be?"

"You were waving your arms about. Thought something must have happened."

"Something *has* happened," answered Jane stoutly, "Just listen to this."

She pulled out the letter and read it aloud. She almost knew it by heart. They seemed the proudest words a mother's eyes could fall upon. Then she looked up at her husband.

"Do you hear that, Bob? Now do you wonder I hurried? And it seems only yesterday that he was toddling about in short frocks and a blue sash."

"What's that?"

"I'm so proud, dear; and so are you! Don't you remember his first day at school? Even then I began to plan. And Mr. Jackson only thought it just possible that he would succeed. We were not to build on it."

"Yes, yes—I remember."

"I never really thought he'd do it," repeated Jane happily. "I wouldn't rely on it. Oh! Bob dear, do you wonder that I hurried?"

Mr. Turner showed very little enthusiasm, in fact a vague grudge against Guy for not having done it before, appeared to lurk in his mind. It did not appear to please him that his son had won a marked success.

Jane looked at him wide-eyed. Something in his expression hurt her. A curious sensation of chill seemed to be enveloping her.

"Don't you care, Bob?"

"What's that?"

"Don't you care about Guy, Bob?"

"Care? Of course."

"You don't seem to."

"Oh, I care all right."

But he did not. He seemed sunk in a sort of lethargy. His eyes were apathetic and dull. He was as incapable of weeping with those who weep as of laughing with those who rejoice. No chord in him responded. To rouse him to a natural pride seemed hopeless.

Jane walked by his side, thinking unhappily. Then she said a little hardly:

“Have you looked at it all round?”

“Of course.”

“The saving of expense I mean?”

“Oh, it'll make a bit of difference. But you'll always be wanting to go home.”

“I shall not leave you more.”

“I wasn't thinking of that. You can go if you like,” he answered sulkily. “Of course it's a good thing. Think of the money that's already been spent. It's some return, anyway.”

He had effectually damped Jane's joy. Her heart felt leaden within her. She seemed to herself to be walking wearily. The way to the camp appeared suddenly tedious and long, and the sun fierce and glaring. Somehow her husband's failure to sympathise in what ought to have been their joint happiness, disheartened and distressed her more than all his previous inconsistencies. He certainly had been unkind to her lately, and two nights ago, when she had had a bad headache, he had laughed at her with a rudeness that had wounded and upset her; but this seemed a keener sorrow. If even good news failed to reunite them, what was ever going to do it? It was his obvious indifference that jarred upon her, his jocular unconcern, his nonchalance. Even now he was whistling softly to himself. He had no wish to revert to the subject. It seemed as if it had passed from his mind. The happy discussion that Jane had pictured seemed now the wildest of dreams. Bob did not care. She and Guy stood alone. He did not trouble to disguise it.

So feeling sick with disappointment, she walked by him to their camp.

II

“I'm going in to Srinagar,” said Jane, later in the morning. She longed to escape for a few hours, and put some miles between herself and her husband. To her surprise Harry looked up.

"I'm coming."

"You? And Daisy?"

"No, no. I shall remain in the camp."

"What do you want to do? Why can't you stay here?"

"I want to get a few things, and look in at the Club. We can meet after your shopping."

"Oh, very well," agreed Jane, rather ungraciously. "Do as you like, only I shan't hurry out. I shall be busy all the afternoon. You must suit yourself to my time."

"Of course. Don't think of me."

Jane found that the practical occupation of bargaining did a good deal to dispel her blues. Her spirits rose as her list decreased. She felt braced and invigorated by the mental effort. The very act of planning and ordering did a good deal towards restoring her balance.

She felt a little upset when she met Mrs. Jansen walking along the Bund. Could this be why Harry had come in? Was he tracking her now from shop to shop, while she fled before him, eluding, tantalising, but determined to be caught? Sybil showed no inclination to linger. She moved on at once, after a few words. Jane caught sight of her again later, followed by a boatman with a basket full of packages.

By four o'clock she had finished. She had tea at the Club, then strolled leisurely to where their boat was moored, and noticed that Harry was there before her. He seemed to be watching for her, and her heart softened a little towards him.

He came up to her.

"There's been a mistake about Mrs. Jansen's boat. It's gone home."

"You've met her then?"

"Oh yes."

"You knew she was coming in to-day?"

"Why, yes, of course," he answered coolly.

“She can hire,” said Jane crossly.

“No, she can’t.”

“Why not? I won’t take her with us.”

“There’s been a ‘tomasha’ in the City. All the boats are down there. She’d have to wait. Besides, we can take her.” He spoke roughly, and Jane noticed that his eyes looked dark with anger.

“Harry, I tell you I won’t.”

He came close up to her, and spoke thickly :

“Yes, you will. Besides, I’ve asked her. . . .”

“In my name?”

“Yes.”

He looked almost threateningly at her, and Jane quailed inwardly. He seemed so large and powerful standing there, that she felt suddenly nerveless and weak.

“How could you? I won’t stand your making use of me like this,” she cried angrily.

“You will take her.”

She would—and she knew it. She would meet Mrs. Jansen with the welcoming smile of convention, talk to her with friendly unconcern, make a pretence of ease and harmony. Harry had counted on it, and reckoned wisely.

When Mrs. Jansen joined them they got into the boat almost in silence. Jane called out some directions to Sultana about her purchases, Harry packed in some of the parcels.

“My boatmen have not returned,” said Sybil, when they had pushed off. “They mistook my order.”

“You gave them an order to come back?” asked Jane, and she made no effort to keep the sarcasm out of her voice.

“You know my Cashmeri! I can hardly blame them. But it’s good of you to take me home,” she spoke indifferently.

“Your husband will be anxious.”

“Oh no; John’s never worried.”

They were passing quickly out of Srinagar. Already they had left the City behind them, and were rowing towards the Dhal up one of the least crowded waterways. Here and there, along the banks, a barge was moored, and dungas covered with matting were being paddled or towed along by the boatmen. Farther up the stream were a cluster of house-boats, with their attendant cook-boats, and under some chenars, a camp or two, along the banks. A long grove of poplars marked where the road lay.

Mrs. Jansen leant back in her corner in silence. As Jane looked at her covertly she wondered that, though she was pale and thin, she could yet possess such a power of holding the attention. There was a certain repose about her, a grace and attraction that made even Jane wish to look at her. In her simple white blouse and skirt and shady hat, she seemed somehow complete and suitable.

They were passing up one of the narrower waterways towards the Dhal. They had left the crowded canals behind them. Here and there, through the tall weeds that fringed the Lake, they caught sight of a few Cashmeri huts; a flat boat paddled by a woman sitting in the prow, heaped up with fodder, slipped by up one of the channels and disappeared in a forest of water-plants.

"Look at those water-lilies," Mrs. Jansen said suddenly, and her voice sounded very sweet and soft. "I love them lying on their flat leaves in all the dark green."

"Do you want some?" asked Harry.

"No, no. I hate picking them. Let them be where they want to be. I don't wish them to be dragged away."

"I will get you some another day—all you like; and roses, yellow and white. . . ."

"No, Captain Oakes—leave them alone. They love the Lake—let them stay by it. Can't we understand their clinging to it? We can sympathise with that at least."

Her "we" offended Jane. It isolated her, and included Harry. It made her feel suddenly divided and separated

from her companions. She almost felt as if she had pushed herself in among them unasked, instead of being the owner of the boat.

She could not but be aware that Harry's attention was fixed on Sybil Jansen. He sat watching her with a sort of utter absorption that turned Jane sick at heart. If she moved her hand, or turned her head, he seemed to be keenly conscious of her. But he was not careful of her in any way. He neither offered her cushions, nor moved a paddle that occasionally jerked in to her. He seemed to Jane rough and rather harsh, but lost in a dream of fascination. She seemed to hold his attention, sway him, monopolise him, command his every thought without either effort or struggle.

Presently she spoke again :

"Now we are out upon the open Lake. I like it best like this. The sun isn't too fierce. It's full of shadows."

"You don't prefer it glittering and shining like a temple roof?"

"Not so much. It's when it's purple, and blue, and grey, that I love it. The floating gardens are like blots of shadow! I'm glad we've left Srinagar, and that crowded, noisy river behind."

"We shan't be at the camp for another hour."

"No, we've got an hour before us."

"It'll be twilight on the Dhal quite soon."

"Yes, it's getting a little misty even now."

They had both utterly and completely thrown over all reticence. They spoke to each other as they chose. It did not matter to them if Jane heard or not—they were really unconscious of her.

It was a love scene and they all knew it. Harry's attitude of absorbed attention would have told any outsider the state of the case. So would his dark, watchful gaze, his lowered voice, his concentration.

He answered a boatman roughly when he asked him a

question, kicked a dog who lay at the bottom of the boat, when he stirred, shouted angrily at Sultana when they just missed a dunga that was paddling slowly towards the City. But all the time he was only aware of Mrs. Jansen. He had forgotten Jane's presence as utterly as though she did not exist.

If Sybil had made any attempt to coquette with Harry, Jane felt she could have borne it better. If she could have poured her contempt upon her, detected her in any little manœuvre to attract his attention it would have been a relief. Her utter repose and lack of effort were an added offence. In her dark eyes Jane read an expression that desired his homage—expected it—and realised that she had it. It made the sight of them very bitter to her.

Sybil was speaking again.

"I can see the Palace, a speck in the distance, with the chenars round it like a belt. Look at it under the mountains, looking out and out, always, over the water."

Harry looked, then turned back to her.

"There's a storm coming up to-night."

"Then the tent-poles will strain and pull. But I shall watch it," she laughed delightedly, "and listen. The chenars will all rustle together, and sway and bend as if they were in a panic. I shall go out among them. Then when the rain comes they'll quieten down as if they were suddenly soothed. Oh, it's wonderful. And in the morning the petals of the marigold will be all over the lawns of the garden..."

"We must go there. We must see it after the rain."

"But you won't understand. To you it's just a garden." She spoke tantalisingly.

"I do understand," he answered roughly. "You always say that, but I do—I do."

Never before had Jane been so conscious of her impotence. She seemed lost and bewildered among all the cogs and wheels of Life. It seemed to her awful to sit and watch

these two, unable to throw in the weight of her personality, to wrench their attention to herself. Surely she was like a ghost, a thing of shadow and weakness, watching a scene, but powerless to act or speak!

Bob's unkindness and callousness rolled back on her like a wave. He had not cared about Guy—he did not now care about herself. He belonged to this strange other world. She only was groping in a maze of shadows. His love and affection were withdrawn from her. He himself seemed like a stranger. Daisy was unhappy—suffering—and it was because of these two who sat together in the boat.

She herself felt very much alone. She did not know which she disliked the most, their silence or their conversation. If the one made her feel remote and solitary, the other intensified the feeling.

“Don't make them hurry,” said Sybil presently. “I like to watch—and watch.”

“You are enjoying it?” asked Harry eagerly.

“Can't you see I am?” She laughed softly. “And you?”

He looked at her steadily without speaking, and she dabbled her hand in the water, pretended not to see, even caught a lotus-bud and tucked it into her waistband, smiling happily to herself.

“We're there—we're there,” she called out gaily. “I can see John and your wife standing together, waiting for us.”

He frowned suddenly.

“We can't be there yet. We've been no time at all.”

“No time at all!” she echoed. “I've never been rowed so slowly before. It has seemed ages to me, simply ages.”

Captain Oakes looked at her angrily, but with a sort of intentness that made Jane turn away that she might not see it.

“I wish it could have lasted. If we could have rowed on and on . . .” he repeated sharply.

“ But now it’s over,” Sybil spoke with tantalising gaiety. “ And I don’t suppose John will spare me for such a long afternoon again. I may not even see you for several days. It’s curious, considering how close our camps are, how little we see of each other. But that’s the secret of life by the Dhal, its charm, its beauty ; and it’s that that I like.”

CHAPTER XVI

IN after years Jane returned to the events of these days, and went over each little happening with a sort of weary introspection. They always were illuminated to her with a clear intensity, like things written with an indelible pencil. Casual words, a change of expression, a sudden silence, all remained with her till the last day of her life.

There was the morning that the sweeper was cruel to the dogs, which provoked one of Mr. Turner's strange outbursts of anger; the evening that dinner was half an hour late, which disturbed him equally, making his wife marvel at his violence, his utter lack of self-control. Then, one morning, when the sunshine was all liquid gold, Harry disappeared for hours, making Daisy ask ceaseless questions about the danger of the Lake, the villages, the paths which led through the fields of corn. Then in the evening he had returned, came into the tent where they were dining without a word of explanation, only to admit that he had been a few yards off all day, almost within earshot of their anxious speculations. He hardly appeared to hear their comments, ate his dinner, and went out again to sit, in a sort of resentful silence, on the little beach—then disappeared into the heavy darkness as quietly as he had come.

During these days they hardly saw the Jansens. The dropping in on each other, which had been an early feature of their life in camp, now ceased. The streak of white between the trees which showed the position of their tents, the glow of their lamps in the night, the occasional drifting by of a servant, or a villager with fruit to sell, the shikara gliding by on the water, swung along by strong, steady

strokes, reminded them of their near presence. Sometimes the Colonel came across in the evening, and Jane imagined that in his expression she detected a vague trouble, a sort of apprehension. They never resumed their old confidential talks. A sort of barrier seemed to have been erected between them, the wall that is built, day by day, between two people who have been on terms of comradeship with one another and dread its renewal.

"We have all something to conceal now," thought Jane sadly. "I hide Bob's temper—and childishness . . . and all the dreadful change that has come over him. Daisy will keep up her pitiful farce to the end. She will never admit Harry's alteration to another creature but me—and even that hurts her. And Colonel Jansen—what has he to conceal? Perhaps more than any of us . . . who knows? Why should we meet? We can't be open. We are afraid of letting our secrets slip out. We all want to be just acquaintances . . . skate over the thin ice—say how lovely the water looked this morning, and did anyone notice the sunset last night? And how soon is it going to get too hot to stay down? That is as far as we will allow ourselves. Oh, what can have come over us that we can't even be friends!"

Although Jane hardly ever saw Sybil Jansen, except as a slim, white figure in the distance, who if met face to face threw a few casual words, and detached herself as quickly as possible, she was hardly ever absent from her thoughts. By her very elusive ways she seemed to impress herself vividly upon the minds of those about her. Her few slow, drawling words, her wide, dark eyes, her light, graceful movements, all seemed to Jane to show a marked personality. She could not forget her, try as she would, neither could she ignore her. On the one occasion that she had tea with her in their camp—Daisy having excused herself at the last minute—even her husband's character seemed subservient to hers. She did not exert herself

to entertain her visitor, beyond the baldest conventionalities, but all the time that Jane chatted with Colonel Jansen, talking idly now about this or that little happening of camp-life, she *felt* the silent presence of this thin, dark-eyed woman.

“Back again?” asked Daisy when she returned.

“Yes, here I am.”

“You haven’t hurried. I have watched you coming along the shore. You walked as though you were tired.”

“So I am,” said Jane heavily—“very tired.”

“Why did you go? It is nicer here.”

“I don’t know why I went.”

“He is your greatest friend?”

“I suppose so.”

But she made no attempt to use his friendship. While speaking she was only conscious of the barrier. She hoped her casual words concealed the chasm that had yawned between them, from Daisy’s curiosity. She dreaded the bright look in her eyes, the questions she knew were trembling on her lips.

“Queer how you two get on!” said Daisy.

“Is it?”

“Why yes. You’re not the woman for friends—intimate ones I mean. Even Emily Taylor is kept in a sort of outer circle. She *thinks* she’s inside—but we know better. Now Colonel Jansen . . .”

But they were both thinking of his wife. While they tossed the ball of conversation lightly to and fro, each mind was stealthily working. The woman in the background, who seemed to hold their destinies in her slim hands, also held their thoughts, to the exclusion of all others. They did not want to talk of her. Her name had dropped almost completely out of their conversation. But Jane knew that she was as little out of Daisy’s thoughts as she was absent from her own.

And so the days passed without event or incident. In a curious, indefinable sort of way she felt herself to be

separated from them all. Always the most sympathetic of women, never deaf to any appeal, she was conscious of a certain isolation. Bob appeared to her now to present a kind of strangeness. It was as though he had withdrawn himself from her into a sort of impenetrable reserve. He no longer made calls upon her companionship, her patience, her affection. When she compared him with his former self she felt chilled. She could not understand the state of mind through which he was passing. When he would sit for hours turning over the leaves of a book, his moodiness repelled her. She could no longer try and break it through, offer herself as his companion for walks, sit by him as he smoked in the evenings.

She was acutely conscious of the suffering, the apprehension, the stifled jealousy that Daisy daily endured. She knew the weariness of the moments that she spent while Harry sat by himself, or walked up and down after dinner in the darkness, with the end of his cigarette glowing in the dark, out of range of their friendly talk. But somehow Daisy wished to bear it alone. She did not seem to want sympathy and advice. In a subtle way she conveyed the impression that Jane's tears could be kept for herself, her pity, her affection were undesired.

And Harry? To him she certainly owed her darkest moments. In looking back afterwards, throwing the searchlight of memory over these days, living over the long hours, each with its trivial happenings, its tiny incidents, her mind always endured a species of recoil when it reverted to him. She had always been attracted, in a queer, intangible way, by his soft tread, his graceful movements, his good looks. His reserve, long silences and curious moods had made the appeal to her that a difficult one so often makes to a thoroughly normal nature. Now she felt brought up short by a sort of impenetrability. It no longer fascinated and attracted her—it appalled her. A certain solitariness seemed to envelop him. She could not break

through so heavy a moodiness. Above all things she dreaded to arouse his animosity. To watch his large form slouching about the camp filled her with fear. His powerful hands, hunched shoulders, brooding eyes seemed always before her.

When he went off for a walk by himself the sense of uneasiness seemed to lift slightly, the sunshine again seemed a gentle thing. The loveliness crept over the water, a thousand voices whispered to her of her first love, her delight in its changes, its moods, its softness and sudden hardness. But with his return disquietude would come back and brood again over her spirit. In his presence—as he sat in silence, or answered Daisy's questions with short, ungenial words—it seemed like a horror, ever present, insistent, demanding her notice.

Restlessness returned to her, drove her about the camp on fruitless errands, gave her a longing for movement, then disturbed her nights with an overpowering fatigue. In the mornings she would wake with a strange sense of chill and apprehension, of vague expectation. She would watch the pale light in the sky, listen to the slow lapping of the water, the faint stirrings of life in the village, with a strange wonder. Another day had begun . . . and then . . . and then . . . ? She began to notice things, and attach a meaning to them that once would have appeared foolish. Some little incident, as trivial as a passing boat, a flutter of wind, would cause her to brood painfully ; and a strange silence fell upon her. Sometimes she made an effort, and their dinner-table seemed gay and cheerful, then she relapsed suddenly, asking herself fretfully why she had done it, what end had been served by her pretence.

The companionship of the others had become irksome to her. But above all she dreaded her own. She would even sit by her husband when his resentful silence showed her it vexed him, rather than endure her own company. His few sharp words seemed to hurt her less than unbroken hours with only her own haunting thoughts.

In these days, the faces of the Cashmeri boatmen—that most gentle of all races—appeared to her dark and threatening. Their singing seemed like a dirge, their looks strange and sinister.

The servants even began to quarrel among themselves. Once she would have shouted “chup, chup,” angrily in their direction, and reported the matter to her husband. Now she listened with a quaking heart.

Something walked by the shores of the Lake. She felt it every hour of the day; as evening crept on, in the clear waking of the dawn. She did not know its name. It could not be included under the all-embracing ones of fancy and hysteria. Above all things she did not wish to see its face.

As the days passed Jane realised something about herself. Never introspective, nor given to that minute self-examination which many people so lavishly indulge, she recognised its presence with a shock of surprise. It seemed so strange a feeling that had forced itself into her consciousness. Then she took it to herself as a daily, hourly companion, neither putting it away nor shutting her eyes to its coming.

She knew herself to be waiting for something—something she dreaded inexpressibly. She was conscious of its sure approach. Every golden hour of the day, as the evening faded into night, every minute of the heavy-scented darkness, with its calls and rustlings, and strange, sudden calms, was leading it nearer. She felt its presence as she walked beneath the walnut trees, through the fields by the mulberry grove, rowed over the Lake in the shadow of the hills. It slipped in beside her at night in her tent, called above the croaking of the frogs in the marshy ground, the whispering of the poplars, the distant howling of the pariah dogs. In the morning it was there before the dawn, waiting to remind her as she woke that they must spend another day together, watch through the hours till . . . And she—Jane Turner—most prosaic of mem-sahibs, who

had never before even touched the fringe of the unknown, was aware of it, deep down in that shrinking soul of hers, and she knew, in spite of the shuddering of the spirit, the recoil, the unwillingness, she would have to meet it, could not turn down a bypath to avoid its coming, must go on till she met it face to face.

CHAPTER XVII

ONE afternoon, as Jane was writing in the shade, Daisy came and sat down beside her. She took up a book, and turned over the leaves restlessly, hardly glancing at the pages.

Presently both women looked up. A boat was approaching on the water, being swung along by steady, powerful strokes. In it sat Mrs. Jansen, looking out dreamily over the expanse of water. She appeared prettier than usual, her eyes abstracted and vague. As she passed the camp she bowed absently, and the boat went off towards Srinagar, and once more silence seemed to close around.

Jane's pen still scratched over the paper, but her ideas seemed to have deserted her. Before, she had been writing quickly and easily, with a certain pleasure in her work—now she found that her thoughts were not fixed upon it, that now and again she had to pause to think.

Daisy, who had looked after the boat long after it had disappeared from sight, got up, and went down to the water's edge, and stood gazing out over the Lake. [Then she returned, and took up her book again.

Suddenly she flung it down.

"Jane," she said sharply, "I must talk. Don't try and write when real things are happening all round you. Tell me, do you blame *her* for everything?"

"What things?" she asked uneasily.

"Oh, the servants quarrelling among themselves, Mr. Turner's unkindness, the sweeper being cruel to the dogs. I can't help feeling that, after your little spurt of pity for her about the child's illness, you have hardened against

her more than ever, and I . . . I wonder if you can have the slightest idea how I feel about her. If in the depths of your kind soul—oh yes, you are kind at heart—you can ever respond to what I feel in mine. I suppose I was undeveloped once, or one side at least. The last week I have made up for it all. Ever since I spoke to you—was it days, or a hundred years ago?—I have grown older.”

Jane laid down her pen, and pushed her table a little aside. Then she looked out towards Srinagar, in the direction the boat had taken.

“Why do you think I did not like your engagement, Daisy?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” she answered listlessly.

“You know I did not really wish it—your instinct told you that. You never discussed it with me till it was settled, because you *felt* my resistance.”

“Well?”

“It was because I knew you’d have to bring to this marriage great patience and forbearance, I felt heavy calls would be made upon you, and you were so young and inexperienced. I doubted your power to meet them. I knew quite enough of Harry to foresee that it wouldn’t all be like the time of your engagement. I dreaded for you some such climax as this.”

“Go on.”

“Then I thought that perhaps, when the time came, you’d rise to meet it, that you’d fight your battle courageously, try to tackle it with tact.”

Daisy raised her head.

“This isn’t anything tangible I am contending against, Jane,” she answered earnestly. “You agreed yourself that they hardly ever meet and talk, except when we are all there. If this were an ordinary case, or I that sort of woman—I’d prevent their meeting, interrupt their conversation. There’s nothing to prevent or interrupt. I’ve never

spoken of it to Harry. What is there to say? 'You're in love with Mrs. Jansen!' 'Why do you say that?' And there I should be, without a word, the silliest little school-girl who ever vexed a man. No, I realised, from the first, that if anything could be done, it must be by counter attraction—but he doesn't seem to notice. As far as he's concerned, I'm just—not there."

Jane understood now Daisy's pretence of gaiety, attempts to flirt with Bob, pretended indifference to her husband. They were pitiful efforts at "counter attraction." She had assumed a fictitious brightness, put on fluttering muslins, tinkling chains, flower-wreathed hats, to recapture that wandering attention. These manœuvres he had failed to see. Jane saw it—and it hurt her. His wife had so receded into the background that her attempts at coquetry passed him by. He was not even conscious of her child-like efforts to win him back.

"It's strange," Daisy went on quietly, "how silent she has become; but in spite of it, I always *feel* she's there. When we are all chatting together, it is her I am conscious of."

"That is her way of attracting—or attempting it. My dear, you are very simple. That is part of her effort for Harry."

"Has she made any effort—lately?" asked Daisy quietly.

"Well, no; I can't say she has made an obvious one. But don't get fanciful, my dear. It's fatal in married life. If you start looking out for things you'll find them—of that there's no doubt."

"Since we've been at the Dhal, has she ever lifted a finger to get him? No, Jane, you can't say she has. I don't suppose they've exchanged more than half a dozen words, and those before other people."

"Perhaps she sees his aversion to her, or realises that retreat is more becoming than pursuit," said Jane, shifting her ground with the agility of the hardly-pressed.

“Harry’s aversion to her! You are joking,” said Daisy bitterly. “Do you think I can be so deceived as that? You’re crude, Jane, very crude. Hers are subtler ways of working. A clever woman who has failed in one goes to work in another. I was never jealous of her before.”

“You are not now.”

“I am, Jane, intensely—you know it.”

“You are childish.”

“I was—but I have finished with that now. That woman has a power, and the Dhal has given it to her. She’s got some charm which she never had in Sherpore. She is attracting Harry in a way she was never able to do there. She hardly ever looks at him, or speaks to him, but she is about the only person of whom he is conscious. While we are chattering and laughing, talking to the dogs, making fun of any little thing, he is thinking . . . of whom? Oh, I know only too well. She holds him. It is so. D’ye think a woman can care for a man as I care for Harry, and *not* know?

“This place is helping her,” she went on more quietly. “The Lake, the mountains are in league with her. The very cry of the boatmen at night, the scent of the flowers in the garden; the lights which come out at evening, round the fringe of the water, are drawing him away from me towards her. I am not myself . . . I know that I don’t look really . . . I hardly know how to put it . . . not suitable in camp life.”

Jane could not speak. She felt as if she were listening to her own thoughts being spoken aloud. A feeling of pity for Daisy, more intense than she had ever felt before, came over her. So the child knew—she knew.

“Through it all I have a strange sort of feeling that if we were all in Sherpore again she would have no power over him. If she were put again into the circumstances where she had failed to attract him she would fail again . . . and again. There he would be mine. Sometimes I feel as if

he had forgotten me. Yes, it's a queer thing to say, but that's it. I can't wrench his attention back again. He seems to have slipped beyond me—somewhere out of reach. There is something here that makes me futile, ineffective."

Jane looked at her intently. Yes, she was changing, subtly but inevitably. When she had first seen her, Daisy had been an undeveloped child, full of possibilities, sensitive to impressions. Her body had reflected the immaturity of her spirit. Then she had changed into a charming woman, loving and beloved, enhanced by the poise which devotion gives. Now she had altered again. She looked strained and anxious. She could not understand why she should be so buffeted and made to suffer. She was still young enough to be surprised at the experience.

As Jane watched her she remembered having seen a woman look like this before. On whose face had she seen this same expression, the air of one who strives desperately, who fights on a battle-field she knows to be lost? Suddenly she remembered. It was on Sybil Jansen's at Sherpore.

The women had changed places. She wondered she had not recognised it sooner. Now it stared her in the face, so evident that it blotted out everything else.

Daisy now stood where Mrs. Jansen had been. As a creature of civilisation and conventionality she had won in her own sphere, surrounded by the things that added to her attraction and prettiness. Fluttering about the bungalow garden, sitting at some brightly-lit dinner-table, dancing happily with boys in uniform, her gentle arts had won a victory.

Sybil, in her own surroundings, had disarmed her at the outset, without effort or endeavour. In some subtle way she had called the beauty of the whispering poplar grove, the reddening mulberries, the yellowing cornfields, to her aid. Their elusive loveliness was also hers. She had joined hands with accomplices. In primitive surroundings she had come into her own.

"Sometimes when I go into Srinagar with Harry," went on Daisy quietly, "and we meet people, I feel certain I know what is passing in their minds. 'A honeymooning couple,' they say to themselves. 'The rice has hardly been shaken out of their clothes yet. We can see quite well who they are!'"

"Well, so you are."

"Yes; but what they don't see is that it is only the husk of a man who sits by my side. How can they? But I know that we are not together at all."

"My dear, what are you saying?"

"The part of Harry that really matters—which once I possessed so entirely," went on Daisy bitterly, "has wandered away to a place where I cannot follow. That's it exactly. Somewhere beyond! And I can never get there—I don't know the way. But what's left is only the husk. He answers, he sometimes smiles, and I try and follow, but he's gone too far . . . too far."

"He loved you in Sherpore, he does here, only . . ."

"If we had met here for the first time what do you think would have happened, Jane? Just supposing that all that could be blotted out, and that we had come across each other—here. Suppose these trees, and the mountains, and the palace house had been my background? The stirring of the chenar leaves and the ripple of the water my accompaniment? Should we have become engaged and then married? No, *no*, you must see it. I should have been nothing to him. Perhaps a pretty little girl with fair hair. Harry is *himself* here, Jane. Oh yes, you may shake your head. You used to feel attracted by him because he was different to other people. Well, so he was; but here. . . . This is the place where he's himself most utterly, he and one other person. . . . I'm not, and that's why we're divided. I thought this all out last night when I couldn't sleep, and you know it too. . . ."

She stopped suddenly, panting for breath. Her small

face had become very pale. She rose to her feet and shook out her skirt with sharp, restless movements.

"If you'll take my advice," began Jane slowly.

"Now can you ask it!" Daisy's voice had a tiny spice of malice in it.

"People have found it of service to them before now," Jane answered sadly. "And I've had experience. In Sherpore . . ."

"But that was different."

"In what way?"

"If I took advice now it would be that of a happily married woman," said Daisy slowly. "In Sherpore, if this had arisen, I should have run to you. But here? Oh dear, no. You must see that you are entirely different to what you were in Sherpore. Did you think you hadn't changed? Oh, you must see that I should never ask you here!"

And having implanted this barbed shaft Daisy sauntered off lightly to her tent.

CHAPTER XVIII

JANE devoted a great deal of her time, in these days, to writing. After her slight housekeeping arrangements were settled, she had her table set in the shade a little away from the camp, and started to work with an absorption she had never felt before.

If writing can be described as a chronicle of events, and the author's commentary upon them, she certainly failed in the latter respect. This element seemed totally absent from her work. She appeared, to herself, to be recording events in a curious, impersonal sort of way, without bias or sympathy. Formerly she had felt and lived with her characters. Their simple emotions had been hers. She had sought to portray the normal, the joys and sorrows that she herself had felt. She had never ventured far into the wide fields of imagination, or wandered beyond what actual experience had taught her.

Now an element of coldness had entered in. She had become the recorder, the story-teller, the one who looks upon life from a distance without active participation. The reflection, that this would not please Emily Taylor and her kind, filled her with a sense of exultation. As she sat beneath the trees, or worked after darkness had fallen by the light of her lamp, a vague wonder would fill her, sometimes even a slight resentment. A conviction that she had followed the groove too long stole over her. Now she had entered upon a freedom she would once have believed to be impossible. Then she had not desired it. Now shackles seemed to have fallen from her, and an ease and facility possessed her, which before had never been hers in this degree.

Daisy would come up to her sometimes, and stand looking down upon her with a slightly mocking expression.

"Imagination again, Jane?" she would say.

"Why yes, I suppose writing must always have that," she would answer mildly.

"You prefer it to real things?"

"It's real to me."

"Are your Alicias . . . and all the rest, more to you than I am?"

"What a question! Oh, run away, my dear, if you can only talk like that."

Sometimes Mr. Turner would saunter up, hands in pockets.

"Scribbling, Jane? How you women do waste your time."

"You used not to say that, Bob."

"No wonder the servants are lazy," he went on, ignoring her allusion, "if they see the mistress so employed. Heavens! what patience a husband needs, although they don't realise it all at once? Oh, go on, do—I wouldn't interrupt for anything. What do I wish you to do? As if that mattered to you in the least. You like to make a show of asking—that's all. Now please, don't stop for me. That would be too distressing."

And he would go off again in his leisurely, strolling fashion, leaving his wife under the trees, struggling with a dimness in the eyes, for which the sunshine and the glitter from the water were not responsible.

One evening, after having written for most of the day, Jane started for a stroll. Daisy and Mr. Turner were sitting under the trees together, and did not appear to wish for conversation. They discouraged all attempts by curt responses, so chilling in their effect that Jane thought her own company would be preferable. Harry had gone off by himself to finish a sketch he was making of a distant view, and for once his wife had not offered to go with him.

She had watched his tall, slouching figure disappear between the trees, till he had become a vague blot in the distance, then sank into a moody silence. Her small face looked harassed and worn, wearing an expression of anxiety that was singularly sad. Her bright blue dress killed the faint colour in her cheeks, making her appear pale and exhausted.

Jane put up her sun-umbrella, and whistled to Tinker who was moving restlessly about the camp. Then she started off to walk along the edge of the Lake, with the determination of a woman who is resolved on a constitutional.

Some dark clouds had come up over the sky, hurrying along like belated travellers. They threw dark shadows over the distances, bathing them in purple mist. The heat was very great—no air seemed to be stirring beneath the chenars or in the poplar grove. A heavy silence brooded over the land. The Emperors' garden seemed wrapped in a sort of slumber, even the water lapping the landing-steps was less restless and alive. For once the pariah dogs were not howling in the village, or prowling about in search of food. A child selling walnuts passed her by without a word, hardly noticing Tinker's fierce growls.

Round a bend in the track she suddenly came upon Mrs. Jansen. She was sauntering along, with easy, graceful steps, looking about her with a sort of absorbed interest. No chenar berry fell to the ground without her noticing it, no reed rustled and bent to the swell of the water without her eye falling upon it. She walked as a woodsman might walk through his native forest, missing nothing, alert to every falling twig and passing cloud.

She turned round at the sound of Jane's footsteps, and glanced swiftly behind her; then smiled a little as the elder woman joined her.

"Going for a walk, like me?"

"Yes—like you."

"You don't mind the storm? We are going to have one."

"Not if my tent is well pitched."

They walked on together side by side. Tinker drew off a little, and walked dejectedly, like a dog whose spirit fails. The clouds banked themselves up in the west behind the mountains, while a few light grey ones crossed the sky like an advance guard.

"We come here every year," said Mrs. Jansen suddenly.

"You don't care for the hill-stations?"

"We talk of Murree, and Simla, and the Galis, but we always end with—the Dhal."

"But your husband?"

"If he can't get as far, I come alone."

"And camp here by yourself?"

"Why not? The Cashmeris are the gentlest people in all the world. I take a house-boat, and cruise along. I tie up sometimes at one place, sometimes at another."

"And the children—don't you ever go home to see them?"

"Perhaps next year . . ." she answered vaguely.

"Does your husband share your devotion to it?"

"What a question, Mrs. Turner! You who know him so well—so very well."

Beneath the lightness of her tone there lay a mocking sound, as faint as it was intangible.

"But John generally likes what I do," she added softly.

"And if he didn't?" Jane jerked the words out quite without meaning to say them.

"It would not be I who would be disappointed."

"He gives way in everything?"

"You see I married him."

"You mean you have done your best for him? You can do no more, bestow no higher favour. It is his to make or mar?"

"Just so. I never allow outside things to make much difference."

“ You steer your course irrespective of other people’s feelings and longings . . . or anything of that sort ? ”

“ I suppose that’s it. ”

What good to make an appeal to a woman who confessed that if her husband’s pleasure had not coincided with her own it would have made no difference ? That her wishes alone mattered ; anything outside of them belonged to the region of unimportant things. Was there anywhere in her a stratum that was capable of feeling ? Was she entirely heartless ?

As Jane walked moodily beside her she had no doubt of her sincerity. She knew every word she had said was true, without over-colouring or under-stating. She had spoken of herself without self-consciousness. She never posed, or sought after an effect in the shadows of these mountains. What need was there to do so ?

“ Do you like the place ? ” asked Jane suddenly. The words sounded to her inadequate, futile. She hardly knew why she said them, unless it was to hear Mrs. Jansen talk and show some of her enigmatical mind.

“ Like it ? ” she repeated, and in her voice there sounded that caressing note that Jane had noticed once before. “ Like it ? Well, no. I *like* my bungalow in Sherpore, my dressmaker’s taste, a thousand things.

“ I live here,” she went on softly. “ Oh, I know that my body spends so many months in a cantonment. It laughs, it talks—sometimes it cries. It exists from day to day, and grasps at things as they go by. But here ! Why need I laugh or talk—or even cry ? I leave my existence behind—I take up my life. Everything is intensified. There’s no need to pretend. If I lived here altogether there would be no need to pretend any more.”

“ That’s because she belongs,” thought Jane drearily to herself. “ I knew it all along. She belongs—and we don’t.”

“ I think a great many people look upon a walk as exercise. So many paces there, so many paces back. An appetite

afterwards, a healthy sleep. I don't. I go for what I see and hear, and learn."

There fell a silence between the two women. There are silences and silences. Heavy ones, resentful ones, stupid ones. Sometimes there is simply nothing to say, at others things too bitter to put into words, thoughts that can find no expression in any language or tongue.

But this was none of these.

Jane felt that Sybil Jansen was not talking because there were other more important things to do. She could see the patches of shadow the walnut tree threw upon the ground, she could hear the faint rustling and scrambling as the frogs jumped from one cover to another, smell some soft fragrance that floated over the mud wall of a garden. These were to her the important things of life. Words she discarded. She made no effort for the trivialities which did not matter.

Tinker suddenly decided that he would be happier in his own camp than pursuing these aimless rambles by the Lake. He went off with rather a guilty air, raising a small cloud of dust behind him.

Jane suddenly felt very much alone. A sense of isolation swept over her, bewildering as it was painful. She could feel no companionship for this woman. Although their bodies sometimes lurched against each other as they stumbled over the irregularities in the path, their spirits were whole spheres apart. So a creature of civilisation might have felt in company with a dweller in some primeval forest, remote, divided by every thought.

Somehow Mrs. Jansen's silence made her feel uncomfortable and strange. It did not strike her as inappropriate that she, the elder woman, should be making the effort to keep the conversation going, anxious to learn her companion's thoughts, to draw her out. When they used to meet at tea-parties and dinners in the cantonment that now seemed so far away, it had been Sybil who had sought

for words and sentences. She had always paid to Mrs. Turner a sort of half-anxious deference. She, who had never managed to hit it off with any of the elder mem-sahibs, had taken trouble to keep on good terms with her husband's friend, by shy, rather nervous advances and attentions. What a state of mind they really cloaked, Jane had been at some pains to divine.

Now their positions had altered towards each other. Among all its other gifts the Dhal had bestowed this upon her too. Her mental atmosphere had undergone some change. She was possessed of a repose that made the activities of others appear like restlessness. She was entrenched in a calm of her own. She appeared as distinct and individual as a pine in a forest of oaks. Her personality seemed to stand out in definite outline against the vagueness of her neighbours. A charming woman she had always been, but had lacked some quality which would have completed and enhanced her. . . . Now that, too, was added. For who can withstand a pretty woman who possesses poise, that mysterious something which redeems a plain one, and adds fascination to all others?

As she walked along beside Sybil she dreaded her once more sinking into that impenetrable silence. She felt as if, while wandering through a trackless jungle, she had struck a path—now she was losing it again. She ought to have kept talking—anything, not to have allowed this silence to fall again between them.

If "the soul of thy brother is a dark forest," unto what can the soul of thy sister be likened? Is there any simile in nature that can be used when a subtle woman sets herself to deceive? Let those who know speak.

"Then you are content?" asked Jane suddenly. "You don't want more than you have? You wouldn't snatch another's happiness to add a little—a very little—to your own?" She knew she was talking foolishly, incoherently, but somehow she did not care. She turned piteous eyes on Sybil.

"I strive for nothing."

She looked back at her hardly.

"You don't mean to . . . to rob another, who can't defend her own . . . to take away everything that makes for joy, from a child . . . for she's little more . . . and . . ."

"I strive for nothing," Mrs. Jansen repeated languidly. "Things come—or they don't. By the Dhal we never make plans, or look into the future."

"But the past," said Jane heavily. "Oh, I feel it—I feel it always. It's here round us every day. If we could only escape . . ."

"But you can't."

"Has no one ever escaped?"

Mrs. Jansen looked at her with a sort of curious interest, staring out of large dark eyes that seemed suddenly to have become shallow. This woman was deepening the lines about her mouth by giving way to this emotion, and furrowing her forehead. She appeared distressed and overwrought.

"Where is your common sense?" she asked softly. "You ask so much—so very much. Has the Dhal taught you nothing? Are you still fighting and struggling? Give up to her, submit, cease your opposition. Why did you come here if you didn't mean to rest? Don't you love her at all?"

She stopped suddenly and turned towards Jane, swaying, graceful, a tall white figure in a world of green.

"You spoke of the past just now," she went on, and in her voice there was an earnestness she had not used before. "Can you silence those voices that have been whispering through the centuries? Can you? Can you?"

Jane shook her head dumbly.

Mrs. Jansen laughed lightly.

"Then obey them, Mrs. Turner. Why not? Obey them, and be happy in the playground the Emperors loved so well."

CHAPTER XIX

I

AND what of Colonel Jansen? Did the slowly dragging days that brought fresh bitterness to Jane, gnawing unhappiness to Daisy, and added restlessness to Mr. Turner, mean nothing to him? Did the long hours of night, when the two camps were in darkness, or lay chequered here and there with pallid streaks of moonlight, when the yelping dogs at last grew silent, teach him no lesson? Or was his calm and placid spirit quite untroubled by the influences that played around it?

For some time after they had come to the Dhal his wife's changed attitude had caused him some surprise. Acquiescence and a certain detached contentment had descended upon her like a garment. It wrapped her about in a placid happiness. She was as different a creature from the erratic person, who vexed him with her vagaries in Sherpore, as could be imagined, and he found himself rejoicing in the change. Her happiness appeared to him natural, and even sympathetic. He felt that nature had laid her cool hand on Sybil's restlessness, and her quietude filled him with a sense of completeness and repose.

His love for her, which had suffered during their early married life, and had become supplanted by a gentle tolerance, now stirred again. In this mood of patience and softness she appeared to him infinitely more attractive than before. When pursuing the will-o'-the-wisp of fancy she had seemed to him ineffective, almost futile, missing her full development. Now her calmness reminded him of the woman he had once thought her.

It seemed to him, in these first few weeks, that her appearance changed subtly, indefinably. If he had been

asked to describe exactly in what lay the difference he could not have done so, would have had to confess that he could not say what had altered in her. Certainly she had lost her tragic expression, her face was if anything rounder and softer, her voice had gained in *timbre* and tone. But even as he noticed these points he realised that the change lay in some far deeper, some radical alteration. All the sparkle seemed to have left her eyes. They appeared infinitely soft and liquid. They seemed to look tenderly on the objects about her, almost caressingly. And above everything, all incongruity seemed to have fallen from her. The excitement and waywardness of her former self had gone utterly.

He began to watch her as she sat under the trees during the hot afternoon hours, or when evening had fallen. He liked to see those slim white fingers lying still, and her absolute repose. Even when a chenar berry fell sharply near her, it seemed remote and distant. The faint ripple of the water appeared to him like the undercurrent of her thoughts.

"Are you happy here?" he asked one day.

"Happy? Why yes." She laughed softly, as at the foolishness of a child.

"You like the rest and quiet of it?"

"Yes, John. Can't you see I do?"

"Of course I see it. But I like to hear you say it. You don't talk much nowadays, Sybil."

"Why should I?"

"We've been here a fortnight to-day. It seems to me infinitely longer," went on Colonel Jansen slowly. "I can't tell why, but I seem to have passed through centuries of . . . it's difficult to put it plainly . . . centuries of experience. . . . Why I can't tell. . . ."

She frowned ever so slightly.

"A fortnight. Why will you pin things down to a definite time? Must you always be measuring and weighing?"

“ I won’t if you don’t like it.”

“ No, don’t ” ; she spoke almost sharply.

As he watched his wife, Colonel Jansen found himself wishing that it might always be like this, that this new and softened companion might return with him to Sherpore. If only this mood that made her so delightful a presence might not pass from her. If she could only learn to adapt herself to station routine in the way she had to their camp life.

As the first few days of their stay at the Dhal lengthened out into weeks, Colonel Jansen thought much about his wife. His mind, spurred on by interest, fell to speculating about this change. He found himself comparing the Sybil of Sherpore with this new person, and always he wondered. . . .

He watched her with curiosity, and the wonder that was growing in him. He felt himself suddenly to be very much at peace with the world. His happiness had always been vexed by the subtle undercurrent of dissatisfaction his wife had managed to instil into any circle. Her influence had been an unsettled and unsettling one. Her sudden storms and petulance had been an endless source of disquietude to him.

One evening, when they had been sitting silent, he said suddenly :

“ Shall we always come here for our leave ? ”

She did not answer his question, but laughed a little.

“ You like it, too ! Oh, John, you of all people.” She turned her head to look at him mockingly.

“ Well, why not ? D’ye think I only care for office work and a son-baked station ? Why shouldn’t I ? ”

“ You ! ” She laughed again joyously.

“ You’re very gay to-day.”

“ Don’t you like me to be so ? ”

“ My dear, if you only realised how happy it does make me.”

She turned from him, frowning a little.

"You don't really like the Dhal, John. You're not that kind. You don't respond to it as I do. You're too . . . too . . ."

"Opaque?" he suggested.

"No—good. Much too good."

He smiled at her sudden earnestness.

"Too good? That's an odd thing to disqualify me. But you are mistaken, Sybil—I do like it."

"You're not like me, John. You never, never could feel just as I do. You'd better not wish it. Besides—you don't understand."

"Well, have it your own way; but I was beginning to think I did."

II

But as the days passed Colonel Jansen realised that he did not understand. If his wife had bewildered him before by her strangeness and perversity, she now intensified the confusion by her change of mood. But there was this difference: before his kindness and steady affection had been necessary to her. They had given her a stability she had required. They had strengthened and guided her. Now she demanded nothing of him. In this mood of contentment and happiness he had become of no importance. If she had entered on a new phase of existence, it was most certainly one in which he had no place. He felt himself to be shut out from the real interest that absorbed her.

She was happy—yes—but apart from him. There was no real understanding between them. Her need of him had united them, her happiness separated them. She no longer made heavy demands on his patience and forbearance. The sharp petulance that had once distinguished her had disappeared. She spoke, moved, and looked like a woman who is at one with her self and her surroundings. The tiny accidents and trivialities of camp life passed her by without

vexation. The things that once would have roused her to a frenzy of irritation, now had no power over her.

Colonel Jansen became conscious of a conclusion. Sybil's changed atmosphere was due to one cause. Her stillness sprang from some definite source. It was no outward thing, assumed to impress outsiders, no pose she had adopted at will.

It was some secret, overpowering sense of satisfaction that was possessing her, which was quietening her, softening, changing her. It never left her consciousness. It uplifted, and at the same time, invigorated her. It made the eventless hours pass without tedium. With it as her companion they seemed all too short.

Her calmness was not the calmness of renunciation, but of success. She had given up nothing. She was about to attain. She was revelling in a sense of satisfaction, the object pursued had become the object achieved.

As time went on, Colonel Jansen became aware that something else had dropped away from his wife, something that, hitherto, she had tried to keep up between them. It was the thin, faint disguise under which she had sheltered herself, the veil she had held up between them, the mask behind which she had concealed her real features.

Often before, when by some little unguarded word or action she had shown a glimpse of herself as cruel or relentless, she had tried with soft tones and careful words to obliterate the impression on his mind. She had taken pains to repaint the picture, show herself to him as gentle, pliable. She had tried to wipe away the bad impression.

Now she never did. She rather paraded it before him. And in her changed attitude he found a certain disquietude.

It was as if she had entered upon a new phase of her being, one in which she knew she had done with all concealment. She discarded it as an animal would a skin. The deluding picture of the woman she wished to appear, which she had tirelessly held up before him, now seemed

unnecessary. He saw her as she was—and she knew that he saw. Her callousness about their child's illness, her self-absorption, her indifference were obvious to him, and she made no attempt to soften the impressions he daily received. She knew that he was seeing her with the veil of civilisation torn utterly aside, that she was betraying herself in every word, and mood, and action, that never again could her husband forget her as he now knew her to be, that she was pulling down the fabric he had tried to keep intact.

One day he said quietly :

“ You're changed, Sybil.”

She did not attempt to deny it, but answered lightly :

“ I don't pretend.”

“ In Sherpore then you won't pretend either ? ”

“ That's so far off.”

“ You feel like that now, but we shall have to return to station life.”

She looked up at him suddenly.

“ Your friend, Mrs. Turner, is also living by the Dhal, and getting rid of some of her commonplaceness. Haven't you noticed it ? She doesn't look as if she liked it. Poor Mrs. Turner ! She has sunk into utter futility, and she knows it. All the people she used to ' manage ' have slipped beyond her.”

“ She likes this place—she told me so herself,” he answered shortly.

“ She *thinks* she does,” his wife replied calmly. “ And so do you.”

“ I hate it,” Colonel Jansen answered sharply ; “ and you've made me.”

“ Ah, that's more like you,” she went on placidly. She seemed to have entered upon a phase he could not understand. Her movements became charged, for him, with a terrible interest. He could not forget or ignore her. If she strolled out by herself along the fringe of the lake, he

waited for her return anxiously, expectantly. If she sat and dreamed through the afternoon, he found himself watching her. Her happiness ceased to please him ; it now disquieted and unsettled him. He longed sometimes to break in on her reverie, and disturb her with sharp words. He became conscious that, much as he disliked her absence, he had come almost to hate her presence. To spend an afternoon together under the trees, to watch her arrange a bunch of irises, or to sit through an evening, had become almost intolerable to him. It was not that her silence and indifference irritated him, that her idleness and aloofness piqued him. It was, rather, that mentally he felt he shrank from her. Some quality that had developed in her repelled him. He could not bear to see her watchful eyes or hear her soft voice. All his tolerance seemed to have dried up. Sometimes he felt within measurable distance of hating her.

So his wife's happiness gradually became a source of disquietude to Colonel Jansen. It began to harass and pursue him. He felt its atmosphere pervade and surround him. It became to him a haunting thought that would not be denied. And imperceptibly his shrinking grew.

His tolerant, generous nature began to suffer. Jane's obvious distress perplexed and hurt him. At first he could not understand her reticence, her sharp outbursts of petulance, her ill-concealed anxiety. Then gradually he saw—and what he saw added to his discomfort. As his mind linked up the chain, a sort of horror fell upon him. He could neither grapple with it nor throw it off—it simply held him in its merciless grip.

III

One afternoon they went for a stroll. They had passed the morning together in the camp. Colonel Jansen had written mail letters, but the silent presence of his wife had disturbed and disconcerted him. He had found himself

glancing up at her from time to time, had begun to speculate as to what could be absorbing her, to wonder if she meant to pass each day in the same idle happiness. He had felt a certain relief at the appearance of the khitmutghar. The advent of tiffin had roused her for the moment. But he could not but confess to himself that the unending *tête-à-tête* was becoming repugnant to him. The distance between himself and his wife was widening immeasurably. The few remarks she let fall, her light laughter, which for him seemed the epitome of all shallowness, her idle, careless ways, appeared to him to reflect a state of mind as heartless as it was incomprehensible.

After tiffin he got up, and said he was going for a walk. To his surprise his wife suggested accompanying him. Together they started off in the bright afternoon sunshine.

"Where shall we go?"

"Away from the Lake," he answered shortly.

"Then let us go through the wood beyond the village."

They turned up the dusty track and walked in silence along the road. Beyond a few women grinding rice in the shadow of the rough mud huts, and a child or two, no one stirred. The dogs lay sleeping in the dust. They walked slowly over some grassy slopes to the belt of shade beyond.

Colonel Jansen began to cast sidelong glances at his wife. Why had she come with him this afternoon? Surely his presence had become as irksome, as unendurable as hers was to him? And even as he confessed the thought to himself, he began to make his usual effort to bridge the distance between them.

"Am I going too fast?"

"Don't hurry, John. I like to go slowly."

"Very well. Now we've reached the shade! It's cooler here than by the water."

He looked at her again as she walked beside him. She appeared to him suddenly as mischievous and gay. Sometimes she quickened her pace a little and outstripped him,

then loitered looking at a view of the Lake or a vista of the wood. Then she would rejoin him and they would walk along together. He felt somehow he could not speak to her. For the last few days he had been struggling, trying to recapture his old tolerant outlook, but it seemed to elude him. He could no longer look on her moods as childish and unimportant. They seemed now to denote a state of mind he could neither ignore nor fathom.

He suddenly stopped and broke the silence.

"Someone is following us."

She looked at him curiously, and he felt that she had heard those furtive steps long before he had, now only wondered at his words. She had been halting, stopping, walking slowly, with a sort of tantalising instinct of luring the pursuer on. Her eyes were gleaming with amusement. She smiled with mischievous delight.

Colonel Jansen stepped out of the path quickly, into the shadow of the wood, pulling his wife after him, and stood listening intently.

The whole world seemed very still. No sound floated up from the village, nor broke the silence of the afternoon. The dim vistas of the wood were shrouded in mist. A shaft of sunshine had struggled through the leaves, and lay like a bright bar of light across the trunks.

Then a twig snapped suddenly, and Harry passed down the path, moving silently, like a large animal which hunts its prey. He peered anxiously ahead of him, but he moved furtively and softly as though he dreaded detection.

"That man—he was following us. He thought you were alone." Colonel Jansen spoke with a harshness which surprised himself.

"Oh yes, very likely."

"This isn't the first time! He's always following you!"

"I've done nothing."

"That's true—but it's being done for you."

"John! You've never spoken like this before." She

smiled under the shade of her hat. His anger appeared to her as funny as a child's passion ; sudden, unreasonable, uncontrolled.

" John," she repeated again, with a little quiver of amusement in her voice, " what do you mean ? "

They walked on together towards their camp, he consumed with the anger that had suddenly arisen in him, she calm, utterly detached, her momentary amusement followed by an entire indifference.

Her coolness, her fresh white dress, her very walk added fuel to his wrath. Her easy movements seemed an aggravation. He could hardly bear even to look at the slim white hand that held her sun-umbrella. Her whole attitude filled him with revolt and disgust. He felt himself to be almost capable of violence and a harshness he had never shown her. He was conscious that it was not the undignified position that she had allotted to him, her utter indifference to his wishes that had roused him to this resentment. It was, rather, a sudden shrinking distaste he felt for her. Her happiness appeared to him now a terrible thing. The joy which seemed to fill her and steady her, revolted him.

It was the successful pursuit of Harry that had brought about this change. He had answered to her lure with a terrible completeness, and she lived in the absolute certainty of his enchantment. She had brought him to her feet without a struggle ; now she held him there with the same absence of effort.

They returned to the camp, and had tea, almost in silence. The khitmutghar cleared away and put the books and papers again on the table. The dogs went off with the sweeper for their evening walk. A little black and white kingfisher began darting into the water, then back to his tree by the side of the Lake.

At last Colonel Jansen broke the silence.

" Sybil."

She half turned her head, as though she were listening, and he was struck by the repose of her. It was the attitude of achievement, and it wrapped her about in a garment of stillness. He hated her air of waiting. It stirred in him like a sense of revolt.

"Sybil," he said again; and the word seemed to float away among the chenar leaves.

"Well?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"What do you mean?"

He looked at her steadily.

"Isn't the game played out? Aren't you satisfied? Did you always mean this?"

She lifted her eyebrows as at a triviality, and did not answer.

"When I suggested that you should go home to the children this year, and you pretended that you couldn't leave me, you made me promise to take you wherever you should choose."

"Yes."

"You knew the Oakes were coming here, and you meant to follow? The thought of home was dreadful to you?"

She nodded gaily.

"Yes, yes. Of course."

"Then you always had this end in view?"

"This end in view?" she echoed. "Isn't this always the end? It's the only one, John. Can't you see it?"

"To your relentless chase? Oh! I'm not blind. D'ye think that I haven't noticed . . . after the other years that you've come here?"

She looked at him with eyes into which the light of interest had suddenly leapt. Before they had only shown a slumbering content.

"What have you noticed . . . before . . . ?"

She leant forward and took his hand.

He drew back sharply. "You've been here many times, Sybil."

"Yes, yes, many times. You know you've always let me come when you couldn't get away yourself."

"Sometimes I think you've been here *all* the time," he went on sombrely. "When you go back to Sherpore doesn't some part of you remain, which never leaves this place, is never torn away back to the cantonment you hate? Oh yes! I know it. You are inseparable."

She looked at him through lowered lids, but with a certain gaiety and recklessness. Perhaps she rejoiced at the sight of her husband in this mood, or was it that the knowledge that all concealment was done with, in reality, gratified and pleased her?

"When you were here before what were you doing?" he asked suddenly.

"Lying in the sun . . . rowing on the Lake. . . ."

"No. I'll tell you: Picking up the threads."

"Well, what of it?"

"Picking up the threads," he went on, "weaving them together . . . in a cord . . . till the day you wanted it. Forming, preparing, testing it. Now you've got it." He spoke sharply, hoarsely, and looked at her hands again with a certain horror.

She made no contradiction. She simply gazed at him with a sort of tolerant interest. He was furnishing her with one of the surprises that stupid people always carry about with them. He was looking at her with eyes that saw clearly. He was saying things that she imagined she only had known; and he was providing her with a rare and subtle amusement.

He came closer to her and spoke again.

"One thing I'll tell you. Of course you know it—have always known it—but I know it now. Wherever you had led this boy it would have been useless—anywhere but here. You might have searched the globe, but it would

have been fruitless. Take him to cities, and he'd contrast you with other women. To England? No, there are stronger influences there. The West would seize him and hold him, and you'd have no chance. You knew it. Oh! you knew it. Cantonments? Hill Stations? Simla, Murree, Moussourie? You knew better. You rejoiced when you heard it was to be Cashmere. Your way was easy and plain before you, till I blundered in and suggested you should go home and see the children. D'ye remember that evening?"

"You made me anxious, John," she answered coolly.

"You thought you might have to go?"

"No, nothing would make me do that. But it would have been harder."

He smiled as he watched her. His own folly appeared to him, at that moment, as incredible. He had been deceived by a few tears whipped up, some hackneyed phrases, a voice that was made to quiver. Her solicitude for himself had disarmed, and at the same time, deceived him.

She picked up some chenar leaves that had floated down, and began to lay them on her dress with the absorption of a child. She smoothed out each delicate point and strung them together with a sort of happy detachment. She struck her husband, at that moment, as a creature of an amazing shallowness. Underneath the softness of her eyes there lay a hardness inconceivable. She seemed to him as intangible as a fawn, some creature of the water and the groves, untouched by human emotion, having no depth or affection. And as he watched her a deep disgust arose in John Jansen. It seemed to submerge every other feeling, and lie like a barrier between himself and this woman. The little song she hummed to herself from time to time, the childish way she threaded the chenar leaves, then flung them away directly they had ceased to amuse her, the gaiety of her dark eyes suddenly appeared to him dreadful in their aimlessness.

"You followed Harry Oakes," he went on quietly.

"You knew he could never resist—here. Escape? It wasn't possible. Oh, you've got a wisdom I can't dispute. But there's one thing more, Sybil."

"Well?"

"My misery—my growing misery."

"At what?"

"At this havoc . . . the absolute wreck of Mrs. Oakes' happiness . . . the useless, causeless break up you're bringing about."

Once more he was conscious of her deep content. He knew she could have laughed aloud from sheer lightness of heart. Her lashes hid eyes which were aglow with enjoyment. A tiny dimple in her cheek showed a smile suppressed. As he saw it his heart sickened and grew heavy.

He could not reach her. She lived in a region into which entreaties and prayers could not penetrate. She was as indifferent to Daisy's suffering as to his own. She gloried in the certainty of her victory.

Across the water, in sweet cadences and trills, came the sound of a voice. It was the mallee singing among the trees of the garden.

"Why do you talk to me like this to-night?" asked Sybil softly.

Colonel Jansen looked at her with a flash of comprehension.

"Because . . . when he sings . . . and only when he sings, I know you for what you are," he answered slowly.

CHAPTER XX

I

“ Is Harry still out ? ”

“ How should I know ? ”

“ He has been sketching perhaps. . . . Bob saw the Jansens returning from Srinagar just now.”

“ There he is coming up that path.”

The two women turned to watch him as he slowly approached the camp, Jane with a sudden bitterness as at one who had given her cause to suffer, Daisy with an interest she was at no pains to disguise. He moved slowly up the uneven track, sometimes stumbling a little over the roughness of the ground, then coming on again with bent head. He walked heavily, without his usual spring, as a man does who is tired and dispirited.

A Cashmeri child, carrying mulberries, suddenly darted out in front of him, and held up his basket. Then he followed him with piteous whines, pattering after him through the dust, a ragged, half-naked little figure. Harry shook his head impatiently, but the boy still followed, with the persistence of his kind, at an ambling trot, staggering under the weight of his load, emaciated, feeble, all his strength concentrated in the shrill, thin voice.

Harry turned suddenly upon him. He did not raise his arm ; he neither shouted nor gesticulated, but there was that in his face which made the child drop his basket, and run back to his village, while the mulberries rolled here and there in the dust, dyeing it purple. Then he turned, and came towards the camp and the two silent women who sat under the trees.

Jane hoped that Daisy had not seen. Daisy tried to

assure herself that Jane was looking the other way. But each knew, deep down in that subconscious self which is capable of no deception, that it was the vainest of all hopes.

Harry came up to them with lagging steps. As he approached Tinker got up, and slunk away into the background. One of the boatmen, who had been tying up the shikara close to them, singing softly under his breath, paddled away, and chose another place a little further up. The chatter from the servants' quarters suddenly grew still.

"Where have you been?" asked Daisy sharply.

He looked at her sombrely, then answered shortly:

"Along the shore."

"Alone?"

"Why not?"

"You don't answer."

"Will you give me that sketch you are doing?" Jane interposed hurriedly. "I should like it for my bungalow. Directly you began it, I wanted it. It will remind me. . . . Please, Harry."

"Of course."

But Daisy was not to be deterred. She had a childish dislike to being managed, also an inclination to precipitate things. She had no intention of being what she called "talked down." She did not see that it was to save her from disaster that Jane had interposed. She was not to be frustrated by any device.

"We will have it framed for you. I will get it done in Srinagar," she answered, associating herself with the sketch in a sort of part ownership. "I have been sitting here all the morning," she went on petulantly. "That ought not to be. Jane was busy with her writing. No one ever expects Mr. Turner to be about. But you, Harry. You really *ought*, you know. Can't you give me an hour or two of your company? or are you too busy doing pictures for other people? You might spend a little time with me—you really *ought*, you know," she added childishly.

Harry made no answer. He was looking steadily ahead, at the place where he had met the Cashmeri boy. The purple mulberries were still scattered over the path. The basket lay upturned on the grass. Tinker was sniffing at it with the detached air of one who is forced to make an inquiry, but feels no personal interest. Having completed his investigations he moved off with an unconvincing assumption of indifference.

"Mrs. Taylor's husband still takes trouble about her. I have seen him driving her about, and amusing her. Why don't you?"

"Don't compare yourself to her," said Jane sharply. "Whatever makes you do it? Emily Taylor indeed!"

"Why not? She has kept her husband. She deserves to be imitated. You are never just, Jane, to a woman whose hair doesn't curl naturally. You never appreciated her. I think she has what's worth having. You only look at superficial things. You can't be fair to Emily just because her taste in clothes is different to yours. That's what it amounts to!"

For the first time Harry moved impatiently. Perhaps the sound of Daisy's voice irritated him, or was it that the thinly-veiled allusions grated on him, and penetrated ever so slightly the crust in which he had encased himself?

"Your writing is making you narrow," Daisy went on recklessly. "You no longer take an interest in real things. Harry used to, but he's become *distract*, absent. You know it, dear, don't you?"

"Human nature," suggested Jane soothingly.

They both spoke as though Harry were not present.

"Pooh—I don't believe it. A man behaves in the way that is pleasant to him. If he loves a girl—he considers her. But if he doesn't . . ." Then frightened at her own words: "But I don't believe that. They don't understand what appeals to us . . . what we value. They place things differently. Perhaps it's that. I try to think it's that."

She looked at her husband wistfully. If he had returned the glance, what then? Would the finger of fate have written differently? If he had made one sign, would she have ceased her useless efforts, left him in the peace he so desired?

As she watched the Oakes, Jane suddenly remembered the first time she had seen them together. It had been in her own bungalow in Sherpore, a few evenings after Daisy's arrival. Harry had got up for dinner after his attack of fever. She had just come in from a drive with Mr. Turner. The lamps had been lit, the doors shut. The night was starry and clear. They had brought in a stream of cold air with them, and she had called to them to come in quickly. Daisy had got a colour from driving back from the Club through the crisp air. Harry had looked at her steadily, she had glanced at him shyly. He had been very quiet all the evening, but no movement or word of hers had escaped him. He listened to her with attention, gradually became more or less unconscious of everyone else in the room. She had regarded him with dawning interest. The dimple had reappeared over and over again in her cheek. When they had first caught sight of each other had been, in reality, the moment that swayed their destinies. The great romantic impression had been made then, while she, Jane, was calling to Mr. Turner to shut the door, and not leave them all in a draught. Their feet had unwittingly strayed across some boundary. After that, to go forward was an easy matter.

It suddenly appeared to her as very long ago. Such centuries of experience seemed to have gone by since then. Life had passed over them all with one of its most blighting experiences. She, at least, had learnt the meaning of the terror that flyeth by night. What is that that walketh by day beside it?

"Sometimes I think you neglect me dreadfully," went on Daisy wistfully. "Often when you leave me hour after

hour I try to imagine what our life is going to be like. You don't care to be with me."

"How can you say so?"

"You can't deny it."

"My dear child, don't excite yourself."

"There! I knew you wouldn't. And it's because it's true. You neglect me utterly. My society is wearisome to you. If I'd known, if I'd only known it was to be like this."

"You wouldn't have married me." He smiled at her carelessly.

"I'd have done anything rather."

"Come, come, don't quarrel before me. It's bad form," said Jane soothingly. "You're feeling the heat."

Daisy softened suddenly. She put her hand on her husband's arm and spoke softly:

"You ought to make me happy. It's so easy, so very easy."

"Then there's hope for me."

"Can't you see I'm in earnest, Harry?"

His light tone angered her. She drew away again, and spoke sharply:

"Have I to do all the fitting in? Aren't you going to consider me at all?"

"It's the heat. It makes us all feel like that," he answered. "Go and have a rest. It'll refresh you. And don't be tragic—it's so ageing."

"What do you care how I look or feel?"

"Of course I care."

"And yet you take no trouble. You go off by yourself."

"I am afraid of your tiring of me."

"Have I ever given you reason to think that?"

"Oh, I don't know."

His utter indifference was obvious. He lightly tossed her back answers, not caring whether they satisfied her

or not. He even turned to watch a hoopoe that was strutting about over the grass with jerky steps.

"Look at his crest. Ah! now he's off to that thicket. Perhaps he'll venture nearer next time."

"You never notice now if I'm happy or not. You're too busy thinking."

"Thinking? Of what?"

"Do you really imagine I don't know? I'm not the child you married. Can't you see it? Don't you understand I'm changed—changed?"

"What have you to complain of?"

"I'm forgotten," answered Daisy sullenly. "You're not the same man who was with me in the valleys. You didn't even want to come here. It broke up our *tête-à-tête*. And now . . ."

She was gaining nothing by her reproaches. Harry smiled at her from time to time, amused at her petulance and ill-temper. Jane could have sworn that the little scene entertained rather than disturbed him. He liked bandying words with his wife, watching her irritation, thinking of replies that would vex and excite her. Her sharp words had not annoyed him. They only caused him a sort of casual amusement.

"And now . . ." she repeated unhappily. "Oh I can't bear to think of it. We're never together—by choice."

"You are becoming a fickle woman. You have tired of me," he answered, laughing. "We must keep up the farce. Don't let Mrs. Turner know."

"Oh! Harry, how can you?"

"I can't help noticing you're not the same."

"Now you're imitating me."

Close by a little kingfisher was darting into the water like a blue arrow. The sun shone on his glistening plumage, making him a bright spot of colour. A child bearing a large basket of yellow Persian roses went slowly up the path with lagging steps. The hoopoe fluttered down again

from the chenar tree, and crossed the grass with lifted crest.

At the sight of her husband's aloofness the suspicions in Daisy's mind suddenly became intolerable.

"*Were* you alone?" she asked hoarsely. "While I was sitting here, were you alone?"

Was he going to look at her as he had at the child, Jane wondered? Was she to see the expression in his face that had made the ragged figure fly, losing his mulberries, in one precipitous flight? Would she too fall back in terror before the look his eyes must have worn?

He did not answer, but getting up, walked slowly off. She wondered if he had heard, or if it only caused him that vague annoyance which is all that reaches us when the mind is occupied with some great absorption. They watched him stroll to the water's edge, and stand looking out towards that other camp, in full view of their curious eyes. Perhaps he was no longer aware of their presence; perhaps he did not care what they saw, to what conclusions they came.

Daisy sat on under the trees, beating her foot impatiently against the ground, and watched him curiously from lowered lids. She followed him with her eyes as he began to pace up and down. She was as acutely conscious of him as he was oblivious of her. The love in her had become subordinated to the interest. Perhaps if it had remained the stronger she would have made fewer mistakes. But now the curiosity with which he had always inspired her had become intensified a thousand-fold. She longed to know what was passing in his mind. She would have given almost anything to have had his thoughts spread out before her. His silence barricaded her away from the part of him that really mattered. When he had kept up the farce of occasional attention to her, it had not satisfied her. She realised that it was only the counterfeit of the coin he used to give her. It is hard to expect anyone to accept the imitation when they have once possessed the real.

But Daisy had no intention of accepting it. She meant to win back the other. She believed in the power of Youth, its irresistible appeal. Her little camp looking-glass, hung at an impossible angle, told a flattering tale. She meant to get it back. But how? Here her wisdom failed her, and a certain obtuseness blinded her vision like an evening mist. She could no longer distinguish between what furthered her cause and what hindered it. She was only possessed by a blind determination. Her childishness, her inexperience whispered advice. She took it with the recklessness of the young, who incur risks that would make the old tremble.

Perhaps jealousy, among its other blighting faculties, has a peculiarly blinding quality, perhaps it sometimes obscures the eyes it has first sharpened. Certainly when it enters a mind, souring its love, a thousand points of observation are opened up. Details are exalted to the level of great things, trivialities become stupendous in their significance. The sentence, the glance, the unspoken word become the very foundation of the fabric.

So the most destructive of human passions grows, till the moment comes when it crumbles in upon itself.

Presently, tired with her watching and restless thoughts, Daisy got up and went towards him. Jane looked at her as she stepped lightly over the grass, a slim, girlish figure in white muslin, with Tinker pacing sedately by her side. Then, guessing her destination, he gave up, and returned sadly to his place in the shade.

When a little way off she called to her husband, then went up to him and began to talk to him, laying her hand gently upon his arm. She seemed, to Jane, to be urging something upon him, begging a favour, looking up into his face beseechingly. He remained very still, looking out over the water. And all the time she talked. . . . The tones of her rather highly-pitched voice floated up to where Jane sat. It seemed to her a monotonous, persistent sound.

She wished it would stop. She would even have got up and called her, but for an inward conviction of the uselessness of any effort.

Suddenly Harry turned towards his wife, and flung her off with a quick, jerky movement. She fell back from him aghast. She stood looking at him with something very like terror in her eyes. Then she turned and left him alone on the little beach.

We often place the limit of our endurance in the distance only to find that our feet have already crossed that mysterious boundary, and we stand—where once we never thought to stand—in no man's land beyond.

II

"How I love to listen" said Jane softly, that evening. The poplar grove was rustling softly, singing floated up from the village, then died down again.

"To what?"

She held up her finger. The air was full of a hundred sounds. Like threads in a fabric they all seemed woven into one piece, yet traceable here and there, then losing themselves in the general fabric of the whole.

"Why, Jane, why? What do you find in that?" asked Daisy sombrely.

"They tell me so much. It's all so interesting. D'ye hear that sound from the village? You'd never hear it anywhere but in the East. And that low chant they've been singing all day. It means Life, Daisy, if you care to listen to it. It's all full . . . full of movement."

"I'm tired of listening."

"Do you know how to do it?"

"It's told me too much already," she answered sharply; and took the roses out of her belt, and flung them away one by one.

"Where are Harry and Mr. Turner?"

"They've gone off together till it's time to go to bed. It's close to-night . . . I think Bob feels restless."

"I was foolish this afternoon," said Daisy abruptly.

Jane did not answer. She called the bearer to take away the lamp, and pushed her chair deeper into the shadow. Across the Lake there lay a bar of moonlight. The sky was bright with stars. The servants had put a large bowl of flowers on the dinner-table, and their scent seemed to fill the air around them with a heavy fragrance. A bulbul in a neighbouring thicket began to sing sweetly.

"What do you mean, exactly, by being tired of listening?" she asked gently.

Daisy did not answer at once. She stopped to hear the chant which was rising and falling again—now swelling, now dying away, till suddenly it stopped, and only the quivering leaves above their heads, and the occasional fall of a chenar berry, broke the stillness of the night.

"To *his* voice, Jane," she said quietly.

"Well, what of it?"

"That has told me—oh! so much. More—far more—than I ever thought I'd know. Every time he speaks I seem to hear . . . and understand."

"Wasn't it always like that?"

"No, no. Oh, Jane, don't you see? D'ye mean you haven't noticed that sometimes it's hard and rasping. That's when he's watched and watched, and hasn't caught a sight of *her* the whole morning. Then one day it's contented, in a sort of sullen enjoyment. Then I know he's seen her, followed her, caught a glimpse of her, perhaps, far away through the trees; but that's enough. It appeases him for the time. He can bear our presence with that behind him. He can sit with us, scheming and planning how to bring it about again.

"But that isn't what hurts me most. It's that his voice now is *always* different. It's not only when he's under some strong emotion, as when he's angry or disappointed,

but the very *timbre* has altered. Sometimes when we are talking, I shut my eyes ; then I know it, oh ! so plainly. It has hardened towards me . . . and to you too. He used to like you. D'ye think that he cares or notices now ? And sometimes I think it's all imagination ; but then he speaks, and I realise that something in him must have changed tremendously to make this alteration. He isn't conscious of what his voice tells me. It is *done*, you see, Jane."

"My dear, don't speak like this. You are deceived by your own fears."

"You can't control the voice," went on Daisy deliberately. "You can't even begin to do it ; it's beyond you. It's the thing that tells other people, who know how to listen, what you *really* are. Words, smiles, everything else you can force and twist ; but the voice . . . oh no, that is what you really are. It responds to your exact mental state even if you don't know it."

"My dear child, this isn't you. This bitterness is only a phase."

"Oh yes, but it is. I know things now I've never known before. I am learning every day. I feel as if I've stuffed all experience into these few weeks. And . . . I feel . . . as if I've struggled for Harry . . . tried to keep and hold him . . . just as I'm doing now, for centuries, Jane."

"There was danger in bringing him here," she went on hoarsely. "And I didn't know it. Those first weeks in this camp, I saw a change in him. It was subtle, indescribable—but it was there. However I tried to explain it away to myself, I became surer of it every day. And I began to wonder . . . and wonder. It didn't trouble me so very much at first. I thought we'd entered on the second stage of married life—rather quickly. I didn't see it was going to separate us."

"I've had one warning," she went on after a little.

"What do you mean ?"

“One day in the City, just before we were engaged. I have often thought about it since. He forgot me. I became, for the moment, non-existent to him. Some other interest claimed him. I might have known that one day I should cease to count, that that was the real Harry. But one thing now I’ve realised.”

“What is that?”

“Why that the real Harry wants a woman who is *akin* to him in every thought and feeling, who’s heart and soul in the country, who loves it like a child. That’s the cruelty of it. This other self, which has wakened to life here, doesn’t need me. It never has. He’s being dragged back into the past, where he belongs. And he’s *himself* here, Jane. He loves this place in a way you and I cannot understand. He loves it because he’s real here. And I? What am I? A creature who struggles, and strives, and clutches desperately. Oh! But I was foolish this afternoon!”

“Where have you learnt all this?” Mrs. Turner asked blankly.

“Here—in Cashmere,” answered Daisy quietly.

CHAPTER XXI

THE next day after tea, Jane suddenly announced her intention of going over to the Jansens' camp. She had a definite plan in her mind, and was determined to carry it through. She felt that some distinct action was required of her, and that in it she would find a certain relief.

Harry looked at her fixedly, Daisy gave a hard little laugh with a jarring sound in it. Bob only offered remonstrance.

"First time I've ever heard you suggest seeking her out," he said slowly.

Jane made no reply. She put up her sun-umbrella, and started to walk across the space that separated the two camps, without a backward glance. She felt a little easier now, like a person who sees a loophole in a tangle of obstructions.

As she neared the tents, she saw that fate was furthering her plans. Colonel Jansen had seen her, and was coming to meet her across the grass.

"My wife has gone for a row," he said.

"I came because I wanted to see you," Jane answered.

"Will you come in and rest?"

She felt a strange disinclination to go into their camp.

"I should prefer to walk a little. It is cooler now. We can stroll towards that village I see in the distance."

They walked along the fringe of the Lake under a few scattered chenar trees, across the golden bars of sunshine, over the chequered light as it lay upon the ground. As they neared the village a tribe of dirty, clamorous children, demanding "pice," came out and followed them, then

left them one by one. A pariah dog slunk after them a few paces behind, slipping through the trees like a shadow, with gleaming, furtive eyes.

"Colonel Jansen, I want to speak to you."

He looked at her gravely.

"I have felt that lately. You have been wanting to speak to me for some days now. Is it not so?"

"Ye-es. I don't quite know how I am going to put it. You will think me childish, absurd. I am ashamed already. Any respect you may ever have felt for me must be destroyed. I must take the risk."

"Tell me all about it."

"Oh I can't—I can't," cried Jane sharply. "That's just it. There's nothing to tell. And yet so much. But I want your help—I don't think I've ever been in need of anything half so much before."

Jane walked along slowly by his side. It had seemed so easy last night when she had planned the interview. She had lain awake and thought of telling her friend everything—well, not perhaps quite everything—but still a great deal. She had thought that she could so easily put it all before him, but now . . . The difficulty of expressing subtle phases of feeling with mere words appeared to her as a very mountain of difficulty.

"That's what I'm here for," said Colonel Jansen gently. "Don't you remember at our dance in Sherpore you said you wanted someone to make foolish confidences to you? Those are the only ones that are any compliment to the hearer, the ones that are really filling our thoughts, not the few measured sentences we dole out, each one carefully prepared. Perhaps I want them as much as you."

"I feel strange here," began Jane slowly. "So strange. At first I loved the place—could not bear the thought of leaving it. The lovely greenness, and the yellow irises, and the dark shade of the trees, and our camp, seemed to me restful, full of calm and repose. I spent hours looking

out over the Lake, watching the boats gliding in and out of the villages. Everything seemed beautiful to me."

Colonel Jansen nodded.

"I started writing with zest. In Sherpore, although I tried to get on with my book, it had become a burden. I sometimes wondered how I could ever finish it. The characters were so heavy, so spiritless, and got themselves into such impossible situations. On coming here, however, all that has changed. I have been working with an ease I never remember before."

"Go on. It is very interesting."

"Then I had those I loved about me. My husband, Harry, Daisy. I don't think you know how near that child's happiness is to me. I feel for her as I should feel towards a daughter, if I had had one. It was a source of joy to watch her, and to know that a happy married life lay before her."

"Yes, I see. You had felt wondering, doubtful. Then it was all swept away."

"That's it—all my doubts were swept away. I don't deny it was a relief—a profound relief."

"But now it's different," she cried sharply.

She looked round shrinkingly. It seemed as if a thousand voices whispered softly—"Different? Tell us how it is different." But no, it was only the reeds rustling together, a gentle breeze passing through the willows.

"How is that?"

"We are all altering, slowly but surely," she went on quietly. "When we meet for breakfast, as the long hours go by, till night comes again we are changing. Yes—it is that—changing. Our minds seem to be reflecting something. . . . Oh, I don't know what. I can't explain. Don't ask me to describe what I am always trying to beat away whenever I feel it."

"Bob is so restless and moody . . . and distrustful. He

and I, who have hardly had a thought apart all these years, seem separated. Oh, it pains me to hear the things he says, to see the way he looks at me. I watch him from day to day, and my heart sinks. I see Daisy's happiness being shattered before my eyes, she becoming blinded to everything except her own point of view, hardening because her peace of mind is slipping away. Can we be influenced by other minds, Colonel Jansen? Cruel, remorseless minds, which will have their own desires at any price? Remember we are in the Emperors' playground. Perhaps we have become *their* playthings, tossed here and there like balls, resisting a little at first, then yielding."

"And Captain Oakes? He is the only one you have not mentioned."

Jane looked round her fearfully. At that moment the clumps of irises, the stretches of turf, the line of willow trees near the water's edge, held no beauty for her, only a great uneasiness. She hated the sparkling lights on the Lake, the soft shadows on the mountains beyond, the faint trickling sound of running water near by.

"Because he frightens me—he is the worst of all. Among all these strangers around me, he is the strangest. I'm frightened, Colonel Jansen, terribly frightened when I think of Harry. He's so still—so very still . . . and silent."

"Let us sit down here, under these trees, while we talk."

"Do you know what I think the weakest part of a mask?" asked Jane suddenly.

"What's that?"

"The eyes—the truthful eyes—through which the real purpose looks out. In spite of all the soft words you cannot be deceived. They look at you once—that is enough. Do you think I wouldn't give a great deal—almost anything—to know exactly what's going on in his mind? To have all these things spoken aloud which now I only feel. But what

am I saying?—I know it already. I have known it for some time.”

Jane's voice trailed away into silence. The little stream trickled noisily on its way to join the Lake. The pariah dog, which had not given up its pursuit, crept nearer. Along the shore, a string of Cashmeri women passed on their way to a village, with chatterings and cries.

“Yes, I know it already,” she repeated heavily. “Talk to me, Colonel Jansen. Tell me how foolish I am, how I have let my imagination run riot. Emily Taylor always says she is the most imaginative woman alive—she, who has never known a thought beyond the commonplace. Oh, but I envy her, how I envy her! Tell me it's all nonsense, that I'm below par—*anything*—I don't mind what—only don't let me go on believing these things.”

“I'll tell you what I think, Mrs. Turner. Now listen,” said Colonel Jansen. “I believe you are all going through a different phase of feeling. Different to what you usually experience, I mean. In Sherpore you are under normal conditions—how different I know too well. Your husband goes off to his office in the morning, he drinks his peg at the Club in the evening. You are thankful it is only one. You interview your khansamah, harry the dirzie, chat with the other mem-sahibs about the latest love-affair! ‘Not the way when I was a girl. *My* mother would never have allowed it.’ Yes, yes, I know it well. Here you are wrenched out of your surroundings. You lie in the sun, watch the lights on the Lake, you draw in the heavy scented atmosphere with every breath you take. Your mind is slowly opening to something else—an influence, we will call it. You only resist it at times, spasmodically—a little hopelessly.”

“Oh it is horrible—horrible.”

“There comes a time when the environment that your sensitive mind feels becomes too strong. You cannot close it as you wish. You are naturally a healthy woman, Mrs.

Turner. Mentally, I mean. You don't take kindly to morbid things. You are not the sort that drifts easily into a new current. You resist . . . and resist . . ."

"And then?" asked Jane dully.

"You dread a point at which that is no longer possible?"

"I dread so many things."

"The greatest being when you no longer see things clearly for yourself, but acquiesce, yield to them?"

"I don't know. How can I tell?" she answered wearily.

"I may have a healthy mind, as you say, but it's getting tired. It has so little to dwell upon that rests it. Perhaps it's a sign of health to fret and see clearly, but that will come to an end. What's your advice?"

"Get out," said Colonel Jansen slowly. "That's my advice—get out."

Jane was silent. She pulled an iris to pieces with relentless fingers, and threw the fragments to the pariah dog. He bounded forward, then slunk away between the trees towards the village.

"Get out," he went on again slowly. "Before worse happens. That's your only defence. Uproot Bob, strike camp, move up to Gulmurg. Catch a sight of Nanga Parbat, see the pine trees and open spaces, the wooded nullahs, the mountain streams. Return to the present. That's what you want, Mrs. Turner. Get rid of the past. Forget these gardens and palaces, with their passions and cruelties. Shake it off. Be free again."

Jane felt a sudden unrest.

"Harry wouldn't come," she said at last. "I can't move him."

"Mrs. Turner, d'ye want to go?"

She would not meet his eye.

"Of course, of course."

"If you don't, if you feel the slightest disinclination, it's the more important. I might put it more strongly."

"Daisy and I wish it . . . it's Bob and Harry. No, it's

no good, Colonel Jansen. They don't want it. Does your wife ? ”

A curious look of disquietude swept over his face.

“ Not yet,” he said shortly. “ But you must get your party to go, Mrs. Turner. It's necessary, believe me. *How* necessary, I don't think you quite realise.”

CHAPTER XXII

THE next day, after tiffin, Jane stood in the opening of her tent, and called to Daisy who was sitting by herself under the trees. She was struck with the listlessness with which the girl walked, the droop of her whole body, the lack of spring about her step. Her very dress showed a carelessness which at one time she would never have tolerated. A button dangled insecurely from a cuff, her hair fluttered about with an untidiness which was no longer attractive, her waistband and hat ribbon made no attempt at a match, but each showed a different note of blue.

"Poor child, how glad she'll be at my suggestion," said Jane softly, as she watched her coming towards her, across the grass. "I owe it to Daisy to make a move—I ought to have done it long ago, but I suppose I've got lazy and idle, like the rest. It'll all be quite different when she gets him to herself."

"Daisy, there's something I wish to talk to you about."

"Well, Jane, I am ready." She sat down on the edge of Mrs. Turner's bed, and looked rather restlessly round the small tent. Opposite there was a looking-glass, some coats and skirts hung from one of the poles; in the pockets round, Jane had stowed away her belongings carefully, methodically, with the skill of the camper. In front, on a small planked platform, a chair had been put, and Mrs. Turner sat down in it, and turned and faced her.

"I have been thinking the last few days," Jane began, "that you may perhaps have been a little disappointed in Cashmere. It has struck me that perhaps you might. So I was just wondering why you and Harry don't go to Gul-

murg, while you are up here, and see something of a different kind of life."

"Gulmurg?" echoed Daisy unpleasantly. "Why should I want to see Gulmurg?"

"Well, it's *different*," went on Jane diplomatically. "There you can get society, or not, just as you like. It's a lovely little encampment, in a sort of a cup, surrounded by pine trees, and all round you are the hills . . ."

"But I don't think I want to go there," said Daisy petulantly. "Why should I? I know what it's like quite well. It would be just living in a hut, or a camp, or perhaps even in an hotel, with other people, and playing golf all day, and all that sort of thing. No, thank you, not for me."

"You can have camp life if you wish it," said Jane patiently. "Pitch your tents on the edge of the pine woods, have picnics down into the nullahs, up to the murgs, and the Frozen Lakes. Walk round the circular road, and see the snows, far away across the plain."

"No, no—it's stupid there," said Daisy sullenly. "And it rains—always rains. I don't want to dress myself up and go to dances, or dine at the hotel, and chatter."

"I think variety is everything, my dear. Besides, you and Harry ought to want the society of other people. What have you done all the time you've been here? Harry began by going in to the links at Srinagar, but he hasn't been near them lately. Then he watched one polo match there, and that's all. You mustn't let him lose his interest in things, Daisy."

"I can't help it—it's nothing to do with me."

"Then you don't like my plan?"

"Why should I go to Gulmurg?" repeated Daisy sullenly.

Jane watched her gravely—swinging to and fro on the bed, glancing about with restless eyes, twisting her hands nervously. She saw every reason why Daisy should go to

Gulmurg, or, indeed, anywhere. It seemed to her, at that moment, of paramount importance that she should be taken out of her surroundings, put into a place where she would again become her normal, sunny self, the light-hearted, warm-natured girl she had once been. Another plan had suggested itself to her.

"To tell you the truth," she began mendaciously, "there's another reason why I suggested a move."

"What is it?"

"I don't feel very well here."

Daisy eyed her suspiciously.

"You don't look ill."

Jane sighed heavily. She was, by nature, a truthful woman, even transparent, not versed in the words of deception. It was hard for her to force her tongue into these ways. She hated the circuitous paths by which she had to travel, the deceitful phrases she had to frame.

"It seems to me so enervating—so heavy. I feel so tired in the morning when I wake up. Just as if I'd never been to bed at all! And no one can say I don't rest enough. I should feel different in higher air. I can't rouse myself—it's an effort to do anything. I'm not myself."

Daisy looked at her intently, but with no pity, rather a sort of hard curiosity. Her eyes dilated slightly, she looked strangely at Mrs. Turner.

"I've never seen you look better," she said sharply.

"It's how I feel."

"Don't you think you are giving way a little? You mustn't dwell on yourself and what you feel. It's terribly easy. Perhaps your nerves . . ."

"I am not given to nerves," said Jane warmly. "No one has ever said that about me. I am not that sort of woman."

"Then rouse yourself, and throw this off."

"I can't shake off this languor."

"You're quite rosy—but then you always were a woman with a high colour. And you're putting on flesh—it's

ridiculous to deny it. D'ye want to get your figure back, Jane—is that why you want to leave?" She laughed a little cruelly.

Jane flushed guiltily. She was conscious of doing it badly. Her flimsy structure had been torn away at once. She knew that Daisy did not believe in her story of ill-health, and was not going to take the trouble to pretend she did. She had become quite callous about hurting the feelings of those about her, laughed at their fears, touched their sore points with a sort of ruthless brutality, and had dropped the pretence of not seeing their little weaknesses.

Suddenly two tears forced themselves out from Jane's eyes, and fell heavily into her lap.

"I want to leave," she said brokenly.

Daisy watched her quietly. There was no relenting in her glance. She had no intention of being cried over. She had tried that herself. She knew she was hurting Jane cruelly, but it awoke no pang of pity in her. As she watched the tears welling up into her friend's brown eyes, and trickling down her face, her resolve strengthened suddenly.

"Why don't *you* go to Gulmurg if you think it would suit you better?" she asked sharply.

"By myself? Oh, Daisy, how heartless!"

"Well, it was your own suggestion."

Jane stopped suddenly. She was almost too surprised to cry. A thought had crept into her mind, as strange as it was bewildering.

It was evident that Daisy did not *want* to go. Was it possible that she had become so affected by the Dhal that she could not leave it? Was she so inert, so broken that she could not force herself away from the place where she had suffered so acutely, so fiercely? Could it be that her mind, which Jane had always thought so fair and lovely a thing, really clung on to the morbid conditions which made her unhappiness, that, while longing to take her husband away and have him to herself, she was too foolish to seize her chance, to break the chain that bound them? As she

watched her, a painful remembrance of what Daisy had once been, shot across her mind. How sweet she had looked at the Frontier ball, in that pink dress with the bunch of banksia roses in her hair. Was there ever anything clearer than the grey of her eyes, anything so bewitching as her slow smile, the tiny dimple in her cheek? Now she was a hard-lipped woman, with a sort of tragedy about her. A strained, sharp look, as of one who watches, had taken possession of her face. Her eyes had the expression of those who do not sleep, but lie awake, companioned by questionings and unhappy thoughts. Her very voice seemed different, out of tune, highly pitched, querulous. Her laughter jarred upon Jane indescribably somehow. It seemed so mirthless a thing, so easily provoked, so harsh.

When she had gone off to join the others—which she did with an alacrity that somehow surprised the elder woman—Jane sat on by herself, in the door of her tent, looking abstractedly before her, while surprising and unpleasing thoughts took possession of her mind. The girl did not *want* to go. She meant to cling to the Dhal as long as she could. While longing to be in circumstances that suited her better, which would place her in a more attractive light, she had no initiative. She either could not or would not make the effort that was required of her.

While she thought of it Jane remembered her own curious instinctive recoil when Colonel Jansen had suggested a move. It had surprised her at the time, then passed from her mind; now it returned and demanded attention. Was she herself not linked to Daisy in a peculiar fellowship, had not their thoughts a certain likeness to each other? The idea made her turn restlessly, fix her eyes on the green of the trees, the glitter of the water—anything to shut out the sight of those three motionless figures under the chenars. She herself wanted to go—but yet it seemed to her so unbearable a wrench. She longed for the breezy uplands he had spoken of, the mountain streams, the purple mist which

hovers in the depths of the pine forests. She wanted more than anything the open spaces, the sight of mountains far away in the distance, the crisp air of the morning, the green murgs, and yet . . . Daisy did not want to go, and she herself understood. She knew now the fear, and doubt, and terror of the simple words, "being of two minds." She knew not which was hers—the one that longed to be free and start afresh, or this queer, doubting thing that clung to all it hated, and would not turn itself to healthy things.

Had the Dhal done this to them too? Had it bound them with shackles which could not be broken, weaved a web about them of which they never would be free? As each day passed with its hours of sunshine, its flickering shadows, its dancing lights, had they all stepped deeper and deeper into some region where the mind halts between two opinions, looks here and there, and does not know itself? Once she had been a well-balanced woman, decided of purpose, hard to move. And now? She trembled as she thought, and put her fingers in her ears to shut out the lapping of the water. She could not bear to hear it whispering—"And now—what are you now?"

After tea they all sat out near the grove of poplars, a little to the rear of the camp. A faint breeze had sprung up, making them rustle and shiver together. It stirred the reeds and grasses by the side of the Lake till they swayed gently, crept through the mulberry leaves, passed over the gardens carrying a hundred scents.

When the khitmutghar had taken away the tea, and Bob had lit his pipe, Mrs. Turner reopened her campaign. This place was getting hot, she remarked; they were on a holiday, and out to enjoy themselves. There was really no reason why they should stay a day longer than they liked. Surely the inaction was beginning to bore the others as it was herself? Personally she would be very pleased to get back to her fellow-creatures again.

Poor Jane, even as she was speaking, felt a strange sinking of the soul. Surely all champions of lost causes are conscious of the same? The sensation of impotence, of futility, enveloped and engulfed her. She was not at all sure that she was very far from tears again, but she went bravely on, weaving words together, coining sentences, arranging her arguments with a pitiful courage.

"That's you all over," Bob interrupted angrily. "Go? Why should we go? I don't see why."

"The place is getting hot, dear. Everyone has left Srinagar now and gone up to Gulmurg. The nights are insupportable—you said so yourself last evening. And isn't it all rather foolish? You have grumbled, and now I suggest moving, it seems the last thing you wish to do," said Jane good-temperedly.

"Move . . . move . . . move. If that isn't a woman all over," went on Mr. Turner, working himself up gradually. "Directly you get the camp pitched—and in the best possible place, mind you, that I could find—it's time to go. She isn't satisfied, what woman ever is? That's what my life has been. I try to please you, but it's always something else you want, never the thing you have."

Jane noticed with horror that her husband's face had suddenly grown puffy. His eyes took on a red look about the rims. He wrenched his hands angrily.

"It doesn't suit me. . . . It's getting hot," he mimicked in a shrill falsetto. "And, may I ask, are we all to be bundled about till you get the place you fancy? Is that what you want?"

For the moment she felt too hurt to speak. Even now she could hardly believe that it was her husband who was jeering at her, making light of her wishes, gibing bitterly at her. She had a queer feeling that he had suddenly become a stranger, that never again could she give his servants orders, arrange his bungalow, entertain his guests without feeling an alien. Her comfort and happiness were

now things of no account. They weighed no more with him than the wisps of grass that floated by on the water, the leaves that fell from the trees, and lay unnoticed on the ground.

"If it vexes you so much I'll drop the idea," she said quietly. "But you needn't speak to me like that. If you shout the servants will hear you, and the boatmen, and very likely the villagers too. Do try and have a little dignity, dear. This isn't like you—it isn't indeed. I can't bear to hear you go on like this."

But Mr. Turner was not to be pacified. The gust of anger whirled him this way and that. It shook him, drove him before it, possessed him.

He did not care who heard—he wished them to hear—to thoroughly understand that he was master in his own camp. He wanted them to know that any arrangements that were to be made were made by him, and no one else, that not a stick nor a pole was to be shifted without his consent. He had given up to other people all his life—so he ran on—and now was tired of it, meant to try a different plan in the future, was going to consult his own convenience and no one else's.

"There, there—that will do. Let the subject rest," said Jane wearily. "It's no good—we must stay. I quite see that. But for pity's sake be quiet now. Let us have a little rest and peace. You're behaving like a great undisciplined boy. I can't believe it's you—I can't indeed."

"I'll not move," repeated Mr. Turner, a little shamefacedly. "And no more will Harry. It's too bad, Jane, of you to start talking like this. It's too bad, I say."

Captain Oakes sat silent. He was looking straight in front of him with that sombre expression that had now become habitual to him. He made no effort to catch Daisy's eye, to uphold Mr. Turner, to join in the discussion at all, but somehow Jane felt, in his attitude, a fiercer opposition than all, a more determined resolution to stay by the Dhal. Daisy's petulance and obstinacy had chilled her, Bob's

unreasonable anger hurt her—but this was different. She recognised in it a strength of will that was lacking in the others.

He turned slowly and looked at her fixedly. His eyes held hers steadily. She was struck by a curious hostility in them. They seemed somehow to stop her feeble arguments, her little store of sentences so carefully arranged, to freeze up her pitiful array of reasons. She tried to begin again . . . faltered . . . then stopped altogether.

“I felt sure that it was a mistake, Jane,” said Daisy soothingly. “And poor Mr. Turner! Do think of him. He works so hard—you must let him have his holiday where he likes. Think of all the hot weathers he’s done, and now you won’t let him stay.”

“I’ll see to that,” said Bob sulkily.

“It’s so pretty here,” Daisy went on coaxingly. “And soon it’ll be really too hot, and we’ll have to move. Now, dear Jane, say you’ll stay.”

Mrs. Turner looked at Captain Oakes, and once more longed earnestly to know what was going on in his mind, then at her husband as he sat silent and morose in his chair.

“There! you see they’re rooted,” cried Daisy, with a pretty affectation of despair. Then she looked at her husband with a sort of shrinking.

Jane had a curious feeling of their being all against her, of contending against overwhelming odds, of being outflanked, overwhelmed. She was terribly hurt by Bob’s rudeness. He had struck her a blow that had wounded her deeply. Even now she could hardly believe that it was he who had spoken, jeered at her, gibed at her, made light of her wishes. But, above all, she was afraid—terribly afraid—of what she did not know.

“Very well, we’ll stay,” she said listlessly. And the subject dropped suddenly.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FEW days afterwards Mr. Turner suddenly announced his intention of leaving the Dhal. With an entire forgetfulness of the way he had received the suggestion before, he now presented it as his own idea, could not understand what Jane—who had not spoken—could see to object to in it, wondered how she had stood it for so long.

“You see one gets fed up with this sort of thing,” he explained fretfully. “The society of women can be overdone a bit. It’s you and Daisy—and Daisy and you, till a man doesn’t know what to do with himself. Harry’s no good. All he cares for is moping alone.”

The idea of leaving shed a ray of light into Jane’s soul. Colonel Jansen’s suggestion of moving up to Gulmurg, seeing the pine trees, looking out over open spaces, catching a glimpse of the snows, seemed to her, at that moment, the thing for which she longed. After her attempt, two evenings ago, to induce them all to leave had failed, she had felt a sort of apathy and helplessness steal over her. It had seemed to her beyond her powers to shift the party against their will. Now it appeared to her as if her efforts, of which she had despaired, were to bear fruit after all. Her words had probably sunk slowly into Bob’s mind, disturbing and unsettling it. He had even forgotten that it had not originated with himself.

The more she thought of it the more desirable did the prospect appear. They could throw off the restraint that seemed to oppress them, break up the party of six, associate with young people, who would talk of polo and tennis, and draw the Oakes into their healthy circle. They would get without effort into another atmosphere—however little

some of them wished it—come to look upon a good round of golf, or an improvement at tennis, as an event of magnitude.

“I wonder how Harry and Daisy will like it,” she said thoughtfully.

“Oh, I don’t mean the Oakes. They’ll stay on here.”

“What do you mean, Bob? Don’t you intend us all to go?” she asked sharply.

“Oh, they’ll stay. You see—they’ll stay. Besides, as it is, Harry doesn’t overburden us with his company. It’s obvious he’s sick of the arrangement already. Perhaps Daisy’ll make a better show of it when she’s alone with him.”

“But I don’t like to leave her like that, I don’t indeed,” said Jane, strangely perturbed. “When I suggested it I meant us all to go. I didn’t contemplate splitting up into parties—I never for a moment thought you’d wish it. At one time you couldn’t say enough in Daisy’s praise.”

“Oh, go on, do,” cried Mr. Turner disagreeably. “If that isn’t a woman all over. Harking back to things over and over again, and wearing the whole thing threadbare.”

“I feel responsible for the child in a way,” went on Jane.

“What child?” asked Mr. Turner jeeringly. “Oh, do talk sense. Are there any children nowadays of over twenty?”

“In experience, Bob—you know it as well as I do.”

“Well, let her learn—she must some time.”

“Then you really mean to leave her? In spite of my wish—my very earnest wish—to remain with her?”

“I never meant to be tied on to them indefinitely,” said Mr. Turner sulkily, turning his head so that he could not see the distress on her face, the tears that had started to her eyes.

“It’s desertion—that’s what it is. I can’t believe you mean it, Bob.”

“You’ll believe it fast enough when you see the tent-poles coming down.”

“Why don’t you try to induce them to come with us?”

“To tell you the truth, I am not keen on tackling Harry on the subject—or in fact on any other. I want to get

away from him, Jane. I've taken a dislike to the fellow. I don't understand his queer ways. He's so solitary—that's what it is—and silent. You must have noticed it—terribly silent—and yet I feel he's always there. I can't get away from him. It's different for you. I feel bound to go and sit with him and smoke . . . and . . . all that sort of thing, but I can't say I like it. I wonder you haven't noticed anything."

Jane moved uneasily.

"Then this rowing about on the Lake at night—oh, there's nothing in it, of course, but what does he want to do it for! He'll take the shikara by himself, when we've finished our smoke, and paddle up and down in front of the camps. He never strikes out for the middle of the Lake, or takes a look at the gardens. And in the daytime he's not much better. Moons up and down that strip of beach—like—well, upon my soul—like some animal in a cage. That's it—wonder I didn't think of it before. And I don't suppose he's spoken more than a couple of dozen words the last day or so. It's—it's so strange," he added wearily.

"And all this you are leaving Daisy to face alone," said Jane quietly. "The strangeness and queerness of which you complain must be borne by a child, who has no more experience of how to handle anything out of the way than—than that boatman."

"She's his wife, isn't she?" asked Mr. Turner angrily, using that unanswerable argument which is applied to so many problems. "Why should we be buffers between them? Oh, it's beyond everything, expecting me to stand it."

Jane was silent. Her stock of arguments seemed at an end. She was dismayed at the turn things had taken, bitterly reproaching herself with having suggested a move.

Daisy took the news that the Turners were leaving very calmly. Perhaps, as Mr. Turner had suggested, she thought she might make a better show alone. Possibly it penetrated very dimly to her consciousness, struck her as belonging more to that outer circle of interest which had no power to

distract her. She listened apathetically while Jane explained Bob's sudden determination, her own reluctance, the vexation she had felt on hearing the plan.

"But you wanted to go," said Daisy.

"Not without you."

"Harry will not leave." She spoke with finality.

"You will not ask him?"

Daisy shook her head. Jane wondered if she had done so, and did not wish to revive the memory.

"You don't want me to say anything to him?" she asked.

"What's the use?"

Jane looked at her as she stood by the tent door, looking out at the Lake. A few curls stirred on the nape of her neck, the curve of her cheek, the upward tilt of the eyelashes, the whole figure were so childish, but the eyes . . . In them a curious look of age had appeared. It was almost as though an old woman looked out through them.

"Dear Daisy, it is not my wish—I assure you of that. I would have remained—I can't bear to leave you—but Bob's mind is fixed."

"It's all the same," she answered drearily.

"You can't stay down here much longer—it'll get too hot. Harry will have to move whether he likes it or not."

"When do the Jansens go?" asked Daisy.

"I don't know. I have no idea."

A silence fell between them, uneasy, disquieting. Some leaves flickered down from the chenars and lay on the grass, sharply-pointed, with clear-cut edges. A boat glided by on the water, laden with fodder, with a woman in the prow, paddling with short, sharp strokes. A herd of cattle, driven by a tiny child, passed along the track near the poplar grove, on the way to the village, padding softly through the dust, which hung in the air like a veil behind them.

"We shall meet again in Sherpore at the end of the hot weather, when Harry rejoins," said Jane,

“In Sherpore? I suppose so,” answered Daisy dully.

“When I see you next you will be a happy little bride, receiving callers in your own pretty drawing-room. How busy you will be arranging it! I always wondered quite where you would have put those vases of the General’s, and if the Jacobs’ present could be hidden anywhere. I do think Mrs. Larcombe might have risen to something more than a photo of herself in a silver frame. Then we must see about the remainder of the trousseau. We didn’t go into it very thoroughly—in fact we scamped it shamefully. Poor Emily Taylor was quite shocked about it. Only *two* dirzies working on my verandah. I . . .”

“Don’t, Jane,” cried Daisy sharply.

“Don’t what, my dear? Mayn’t I make plans for the future? Why don’t you help me, instead of . . .”

“I can’t do it—I can’t indeed.”

Her tone showed so great a despondency that the cheerful words died on Jane’s lips. She saw that she was doing no good, only rubbing a sore till it smarted intolerably.

“My dear,” she said after a little pause, “don’t mistake a passing cloud for a permanent estrangement. So many young wives have done that, and suffered so needlessly. Things which can’t be altered can be borne with patience and faith. You’ll want it all in after years—every day of them—you’ll have to use it. Try practising now, however hard it seems.”

Daisy turned and faced her.

“Put down that work, Jane, and answer me,” she said quietly. “Now tell me, do you think this thing that has arisen between Harry and me is a passing cloud?”

Jane glanced up. The girl’s eyes met hers, and held them in a long, searching look. What she saw in them stopped the easy, reassuring words on her lips, strangled the lies she was about to utter, struck dumb the little sentences of hope she had framed. Daisy watched her steadily.

“You needn’t answer, Jane,” she said quietly.

CHAPTER XXIV

DAISY had put on a pale pink dress, just the shade that best throws up the fragility of very fair people. It was a dainty little frock of frills and ruffles, and ribbons threaded in and out, suggesting altogether the colour of the blush rose. No dirzie had ever had a hand in its creation ; it was obvious that no dhobie had come near it.

Jane remembered with a pang that Harry used to admire her in this colour. He said it brought out the delicate bloom on her cheeks, and was a rest from the eternal blue, in which fair-haired people invariably clothe themselves. That was evidently why she had put it on ; she wished to remind him of the time when he had said it suited her, when he had loved to see her in it.

There was something pitiful about that little frock, Jane thought, as she looked at it. Its very crispness and freshness had a pathos about it. It reminded her, intangibly, of flowers put in the entrance-halls of asylums, ghastly attempts at brightening harsh realities. It tried hard to strike a note of gaiety, and youth, and light-heartedness, but from the simple ribbons in the hat Daisy wore with it, to the tips of her little shoes, it told a story of failure, of desperate effort, of calculated effect. It had been put on to achieve an end, to help in the battle, to turn its wearer into something like itself.

After that day Jane never could bear the sight of that particular kind of chiné ribbon. For years afterwards she turned away from a little handkerchief edged with pink. It summed up for her the very essence of pitiful striving, and hopelessness, and utter sadness.

To-day Daisy had assumed a new rôle. She had become coquettish, roguish, gay. She laughed often with a great assumption of gaiety, teased Bob, twitted Jane, and chattered with playful persistence. But behind it all, in the clear depths of her grey eyes, lay that watchful look, the strained, anxious expression that primitive woman must have worn as her eyes fell on her roving mate, which even civilisation cannot conceal, nor convention wipe away.

"To-morrow, at this time, we shall be alone—quite alone together. You and Mr. Turner will be climbing up to Gulmurg. What it is to be gay! Four coolies, Jane, will be staggering under your weight, carrying you in your dandy," said Daisy.

Mrs. Turner did not answer. A great oppression lay upon her, the feeling we have all had several times in our lives, and cannot explain its coming or its going, nor why it lies upon us, bearing us down with its weight.

"Then you will begin your society life—while we"—Daisy laughed gaily—"well—we *may* dine with the Jansens, but what is more likely is that we shall sit here under the trees, and watch the lamps in their camp. And the next day, and the next, it will be just the same."

"Come with us," said Mr. Turner gruffly.

"It is too late," said Daisy softly.

Jane heard the words with a dreadful sinking of the spirit, and felt roused to a sudden anger—an anger stirred by impotence, by weakness, by an overpowering inability to struggle.

"Don't talk nonsense," she said sharply. "Too late? What do you mean? Isn't it a simple question of telling Abdul you have changed your mind—such things have been heard of—and have decided to come with us?"

"Yes, why not?" echoed Mr. Turner. "Tell him to shift camp, get coolies, spend a day or two in Srinagar, if you like."

"No, it's too late to change," said Daisy with gentle

finality. "It's all settled—quite settled. Harry has quite made up his mind."

She glanced at her husband with a sort of shrinking in her pretty eyes, and what she saw in his face showed her that indeed he had. Then she did what all wise wives do when they read that look—she pretended that she liked it, that it was her wish, that, in fact, she had wanted it from the first.

"How can you bear to leave it? I can't think," she said, forcing a little laugh. "If I thought it was my last evening I don't know what I should do! Fancy leaving the shade of these trees, to be carried through the hot sun, up and up, till you reach a place where only golf-maniacs go, and have to listen to their silly talk, till . . . No, no—I am glad it isn't me."

After tea she turned to her husband with that hard little smile.

"I believe I should like a walk," she cried. "Just you and I alone together. Do take me, Harry. We must leave Jane and Mr. Turner to see to their packing—they'll be getting so bad-tempered if we don't leave them alone at all. Guests ought to take themselves off, you know. We've been very remiss."

Captain Oakes looked at his wife steadily. Jane hoped, with a shudder, that never—never should she see just that expression in Bob's eyes. She felt somehow that if she did she could not bear to live; she most certainly could not spend the rest of her life by his side. It would mean the end of all things for her, nothing after that could ever be worth while. If once she saw it upon his face, she could never again bear to meet his eyes, must always feel that behind them lurked that look of revolt, of utter distaste, of weariness which has almost reached the limit of its patience.

Jane saw, with unmistakable clearness, that Harry's indifference for his wife had turned into hostility. If,

before, Daisy had ceased to count with him, had failed to hold his interest, she now, in an intangible way, aroused his resentment. She was now no longer invisible on his landscape, but a terrible obstacle, a distasteful presence. Before, her little wiles to attract his attention, her childish arts, had failed to catch his notice. They had passed him by like trivialities; now they seemed to awaken his dislike, to grate upon him, to jar his strained nerves.

Jane realised with horror the precipice which lay before her. She saw too clearly the resentment in Harry's eyes, the care with which he chose his words so as not to betray himself, the forced gentleness of his reply.

"Go for a walk! Oh! it's much too hot. You'll get over-tired, and then you won't sleep."

"Not sleep, Harry? Why I don't know what a bad night means! And you're always telling me not to think about myself. But it's very sweet of you to care, dear. You *do* care, don't you?"

If only she could have learnt to leave him alone. If only she could see that pink ribbons and coquettish glances can never win a man back when things have come to the pass that they already had. If only she would drop the affectation of gaiety that was becoming more and more forced every minute. The sound of her voice, at that moment, seemed to Jane as shallow as the trickle of a mountain-stream, as tinkling as the bells which hang round the neck of a goat.

"Will you, Harry? Oh, do say you will," she began again, looking beseechingly at him. "Mr. Turner, when you were on your honeymoon, surely Jane didn't have to beg you to do things, did she? It seems all wrong, and much too soon. If we'd been married a year or two, it wouldn't matter; but now . . . Why, I'm still a bride."

Jane felt her unrest increase. Even Bob was looking uncomfortable. She wished Daisy would stop. What good did she think this chattering did? Every vestige of diplomacy she had ever known seemed to have vanished. With

the pink dress she seemed to have put on unimaginable foolishness, a folly beyond belief.

She laughed again, and sprang to her feet. Then she went up to her husband and began to pull him gently by the arm.

"A bride, Harry, do you hear? So I must be obeyed. Why even Generals and Commissioners give way to them, so, dear, you certainly must. And all I want is a stroll by the Lake. It isn't much, is it? Harry, do come along."

Captain Oakes got up slowly to his feet. Jane had a feeling that he would give anything to stop his wife talking, that he must silence that tinkling voice. Oh! what had come to the child that she did not see that with every word she uttered she was dividing herself from her husband more completely? Had her woman's instinct gone utterly to sleep? It seemed to Jane that it must be so, as she listened to her flow of words, saw her little coquetries, her smiles, her continuous effort.

"Very well, Daisy, as you wish it we'll go." He spoke slowly, deliberately, looking at her from narrowed eyes.

"I do—I have said so all the time."

"As you wish it," he repeated quietly.

"I knew I only had to ask."

So side by side they went off by the path under the trees, through the evening light, across the bright patches of sunshine, into the belt of shade beyond.

CHAPTER XXV

AFTER the Oakes had gone, and Daisy's parasol had become a vague blot in the distance, Jane and Bob sat on together, watching the shadows lengthen and creep over the grass, and the sunlight fade and soften on the sides of the hills.

Although they sat very still without speaking, they were not resting. Underneath their apparent calm there lay a feeling of disquietude. The stillness of the two figures beneath the trees seemed to cover and mask a great uneasiness. The poplar grove at the back began to shiver and rustle as the breeze passed through it, then suddenly became quiet. Mr. Turner's pipe went out, and he did not appear to notice it; Tinker began to wander up and down the camp restlessly; from the servants' quarters came a low murmur of voices.

"Chup . . . Chup," called out Mr. Turner angrily. Then he turned to his wife.

"I shall be glad to be gone," he said abruptly.

"Yes, Bob, I know you will," she answered gently.

"How do you know it?"

"I ought to say I feel it. You're not really happy, Bob, you've not been so for some time. I should be sorry if I thought you were . . . if you were really satisfied. . . ."

"Perhaps so . . . can't say," he answered gruffly. "I suppose you mean, I've not been quite myself. I've felt like that sometimes; as if I didn't quite know what I'd do or say next. Seems queer, somehow, after all these years. Now we're leaving the place I see it . . . I shall be glad to be gone," he added simply.

Another silence fell between them. The shadows crept on further till all the camp was in shade. A little way down

the Lake the evening light fell on the Cashmeri village, shone on its clustering huts, its background of mulberry trees, its shady orchard and yellow cornfield. It turned it into a thing of mystery, of vague enchantment.

Then Mr. Turner's voice began again.

"One more month of leave, then Sherpore again."

"Sherpore?" echoed Jane vaguely.

"Yes—had you forgotten it existed?"

"I believe I had—for the moment, I believe I had."

"Well, not for long, my dear. It won't allow itself to be overlooked for long. Very soon you'll be jaunting round the station in your gharry, bent on getting your cold-weather calls done as soon as possible. Think of the boxes you may find up, Jane! You'll have some luck, my dear, you may depend upon it."

"Very likely, Bob."

"Then your dinner lists; you must be making them out. You must get together the girls of the Station. Think of the romances you'll be starting—you always were a good hand at that."

Jane winced perceptibly. It seemed to her at that moment a terrible thing to say to her. She felt so small, so impotent, so weak a creature to contend against opposing forces. Could she ever have been so self-opinionated as to think she could sway the destinies of two people, unite temperaments of dissimilar tastes, weigh down the scales on one side or another?

"Oh, don't say that, Bob, please don't say that," she cried brokenly.

"Sorry, my dear. I didn't mean anything, I didn't really. I was just running on without much sense. But you are a mem-sahib at heart, my dear, you know you are. You like bartering with your khansamah, and your dhobie and ayah, and sitting at the Club arranging everyone's affairs. I don't blame you, my dear, but that's *you*."

"I've been wondering lately."

“Wondering?”

“Quite what is the *I* that matters.”

Mr. Turner looked at his wife curiously. “Funny thing,” he began, “we both seem . . . oh I don’t know. It’s all queer.” Then he made an effort to switch the conversation back to ordinary lines. “Hope the La Touches don’t settle on Gulmurg.”

“I don’t mind.”

“You don’t mind?”

“I’ve been thinking lately I shouldn’t object to the La Touches, no, not even if their hut was next to ours,” said Jane deliberately.

“I believe you are right. I do, my dear—I do indeed. They’re ordinary sort of people, don’t you know. Nothing extraordinary or out of the way about them. I . . . I feel quite drawn to the La Touches, Jenny. I never thought I should say it.”

“Could you stand the story with the American and the man who stuttered?”

“I long for it. I shall make a point of calling when we get back to the bungalow, and lead up to it. I shall—you’ll see.”

It may have been her imagination, but it struck Jane that her husband liked to dwell on the remembrance of Sherpore. It seemed to afford him great satisfaction to go over all their cold-weather routine, to dwell on the friends they would see, and the things they would say—all the little happenings that make up Station life.

Somehow it comforted her strangely to picture herself once more occupied with this round of duties. She closed her eyes, and imagined herself interviewing her khansamah in the mornings. His tall, stooping figure and spectacled eyes rose to her mind’s eye, as he shuffled over little bits of paper, and peered anxiously at her. Then she saw her drawing-room, with the corner where photographs of Guy at all ages hung, and the peep at the circular road, and

the shrine by its side. It was all real—real, and she would see it again very soon. She would listen to those ekkas rattling by on their way to the City, to the jingle of the ponies' bells, to the sound of the canal as it slipped by, past their garden. She would hear no more the cry of the boatmen, the howling of the dogs, the lapping of the water by the side of the Lake.

As the evening wore on a terrible restlessness fell upon her. As one wakes suddenly in the night with an unexplained sense of fear, so she waited now, frightened at she knew not what, trembling with anticipation. She longed, at one moment, to go to her husband and beg him to stay at the Dhal, at any rate until the Oakes had left, at another to urge on the servants to pack quicker. She began to move aimlessly about under the trees, backwards and forwards, down to the water's edge, driven by she knew not what, stirred only by the wish to move.

Abdul came to her for directions about the start tomorrow. She waved him away impatiently, then called him back and talked aimlessly, directing, contradicting, altering, watching his amazed expression with a faint alarm.

He was surprised—and so was she, only far more so. Could this erratic, restless woman be, in reality, Jane Turner, most methodical of mem-sahibs? She almost doubted it. She seemed such a different being to the orderly, rule-abiding person she had been accustomed to associate with the name. She no longer cared if the move was accomplished punctually and carefully, if one coolie or a hundred helped with the luggage, if the tiffin-basket was well stocked and lacking in no essentials. All the instincts and habits of her life seemed to have become subservient to the excitement which possessed her.

Mr. Turner watched her quietly, then he came up to her.

"Give it up, my dear," he said gently. "You're only confusing them all with your directions. Why don't you take a turn? It's cooler now."

“ Walk along the shore ? ”

“ Why not ? ”

She paused doubtfully.

“ Perhaps I’ll go and meet Daisy and Harry,” she said undecidedly.

“ It’ll do you good.”

“ Besides, I want to see the palace garden again, and hear the mallie sing. He generally does about this time. And to think that to-morrow evening—and all the other evenings—there’ll be no one to listen to him, not as I do, anyway.”

“ Well go. There’s nothing to prevent you.”

CHAPTER XXVI

JANE put up her sun-umbrella, and went off by the side of the Lake, in the direction the Oakes had taken.

It was almost cool now, and the air came freshly off the water. Even when she had left the shade of the trees and got out into the open, she was not conscious of feeling the heat, only consumed with restlessness, longing for action, for anything which would keep her on the move.

As she walked on past the walnut tree and the village, she did not glance in its direction. She had looked at it so often with interest and wonder—now she was leaving it all somehow she did not wish to deepen the picture on her mind. She would like to forget what the cornfields looked like, with the mulberry trees standing here and there in them, how the poplars stood out against the sky, the very look of a dunga being paddled about over the water. She would like to wipe away all remembrance of the haze that seemed to linger among the trees, the patches of sunshine, the hillsides wrapped in shadow, the floating lilies on the Lake.

As she walked Jane became conscious of a great fatigue. Her limbs ached, and her head seemed to her to weigh more than was pleasant. But she felt no desire for rest, only for movement. The activity of her brain seemed to demand a response from her body.

Why had Bob harped so continually on the subject of Sherpore ? she wondered. Once she, too, had thought of it kindly, almost tenderly. Now, as she plodded onwards, it seemed remote, unattainable. She had lain last night, and mentally gone over every detail of a day. Yes, it was routine, but oh ! how healthy. She shuddered as she thought of it. She wanted so badly to be there again.

As she walked on over the chequered sunshine and dark bars of shadow, she hardly looked to the right or to the left. The dust from the path, rising from her quickly moving feet, made her eyes smart, but she barely noticed it. She found that, try as she would, she could not fix her mind upon her bungalow far away in the plains, with its belt of trees, and well-kept lawn. She was thinking—thinking deeply. Of what? She did not know.

The fact that she was leaving to-morrow did not seem to count at all. It was impossible to detach her mind from the scene about her, and call up a mental picture of the pine forest and mountain peaks round Gulmurg. The feeling of being imprisoned by this golden sunshine held and bound her. Life now seemed to her to be concentrated in these moments, and somehow her dread increased. She appeared to herself to be waiting . . . and waiting for something that must surely come; and the certainty that it was close upon her weighed her down like a burden.

She thought she heard a step behind her, and turned sharply at the sound. A man was following her, and wishing to walk slowly she drew aside to let him pass.

As he came up to her she realised that he was the mallie of the palace garden. She had never before been able to distinguish one native from another, but she knew, on the instant, that she would have known him amongst a hundred. He was shuffling along, crooning to himself, with bent head and stooping shoulders, and in his hand he held a little bunch of roses and jasmine.

He was going towards his village. She could see it a little way off round the bend. It had never occurred to her that he could have a home, or anyone who ground the corn for him, or fetched the water. He had appeared to her too entirely a part of the garden, and the fountains, and the courts to have a separate life of his own.

As he came slowly up the path she watched him an interest that surprised herself. He seemed, at that

moment, to her, to be extraordinarily solitary. In his attitude there appeared to be a certain lightness and gaiety. She saw that, though in reality he was quite an old man, some quality of youth clung to him. It had passed him by long ago—but it had left something of its presence. Perhaps as he was wandering in the marble halls or the rose-laden garden he had caught some secret of its fleeting romantic passion. Perhaps the fountains had whispered to him their eternal message, and the lapping of the Lake had imparted the mystery of an endless gaiety.

As he came up to her he stopped, and their eyes met. Then he put out his hand with the little bunch of flowers, and offered it to her gracefully, respectfully. She found herself taking it, acknowledging his salaam, looking at him with expectation.

His eyes held hers, quiet and compelling. She did not think of the strange incongruity of their standing there facing each other. All the conventions of her many years in India seemed to slip away from her. That she—an English lady—should stand gazing at a Cashmeri gardener no longer seemed strange.

As she looked at him she realised that he was not only a gardener who dreams through hot hours, or flits before visitors with shambling steps.

He was the watcher who keeps his vigil, his was the hand that had torn aside the veil. That elusive barrier that had stood between them and the passions of the past, the only thing that had saved them from some great abandonment had been destroyed by him. And while he had sung they had known it. When those thin, flute-like notes had floated across to them, when he stood in the deep shade of the trees or in the full blaze of the sunshine, crouched in the garden summer-house, or trod the rose-strewn path, that knowledge had been theirs.

Jane knew that she herself had responded to it, that each sad cadence had struck an answering chord in her.

She could imagine Sybil passionately at one with it, Colonel Jansen recoiling from its suggestion, her husband restless and unbalanced at the sound of it. But surely to Harry's ear it told of a life which his present existence could not entirely obliterate. Had it not awakened memories in him which could never again be stifled? Had he not heard it with a certain recognition? Centuries ago, perhaps, he had responded and answered. . . . Would he not now obey its voice with an utter abandonment? . . .

Jane knew now that the gardener had watched them secretly, knowingly. To him they had not been the usual laughter-loving sahibs and mem-sahibs who came for a day and were gone. He had recognised them. Long ago, in some previous existence, when the summer sun had scorched the plains of Delhi, he had seen the cavalcade of the Emperors come to their garden house. And did he not now watch them return to other bodies, hear the story told again, as human nature acts out its little tale? For those who love the Dhal return to her. . . .

Somehow she felt that he was satisfied. He had met with his reward. Perhaps he had become weary with watching, had almost despaired, through the long years, of seeing the return of his masters.

He had seen what he had looked for, and in it he had found completion. And she knew that it lay in the knowledge that the wandering spirits of the past with whom he had dwelt had found expression in them. They had not wandered tenantless and alone. In these short months of summer they had lived again.

She looked at the little bunch he had given her, stupidly and uncomprehendingly, after he had turned away and gone slowly down the path. It was done up tightly, conventionally. A few petals from the roses had fallen, and lay scattered at her feet. He knew—yes he knew. She remembered his song the day of the picnic. She had never forgotten it. It had recurred to her, haunted her, pursued her. And

even then it had appeared to her as belonging intangibly, in some way, to the thoughts that possessed her. But then she had not seen his eyes. After to-day she would never doubt again.

Suddenly her heart bounded. To-morrow she was leaving. She would never again look into his eyes. She would never feel that he and she shared a secret, hear that little song which ended suddenly, listen for it to start again.

"I don't want to hear it—ever again," she muttered fiercely. "No, never again. I won't—I say I won't."

And she stamped the little bunch, with its falling rose-petals and pointed jasmine stars, into the dust before her.

The mallie walked off towards his village, through the dust and gathering shadows, and the scattered clumps of irises and drooping willow trees. . . . And as he went he sang. . . .

When she had walked on some way she caught sight of the Oakes in front of her. They were on the farther side of a little channel which ran inland, and their voices floated over the water distinctly. Every word sounded as clear to Jane as though she were by their side.

She did not wish to overtake them, so sat down on a tree-trunk till they should turn and come her way. She watched them with a strange aloofness as one would a pair of actors in whom one felt a certain curiosity. They seemed to her, at that moment, very remote, almost outside the circle of her affection. Then she wondered vaguely if it were really she who was separated from them, or if, insensibly, she had withdrawn herself into an unsympathetic region where nothing was demanded of her.

She became conscious of a throbbing in her head, and that a mist was dancing in front of her eyes. The weariness which is the outcome of excitement fell upon her, and a greater horror than ever of her surroundings seized her.

Suddenly Daisy's voice broke the stillness :

“Look at those water-lilies, Harry. Aren’t they lovely? I want some to take back with me.”

He did not turn his head at her words, but sat looking sombrely in front of him.

“Think of them in those vases I bought in Srinagar! Oh I must have some—I really must. Can’t you get them for me?”

He seemed to rouse himself from his reverie, and looked to where she pointed.

“Why don’t you get them for yourself?” he asked slowly.

“I couldn’t reach them. How foolish, Harry! You must be joking. Why . . . yes . . . I believe I could. I really think I could.”

She got up from where she was sitting, and picked her way daintily over the strip of marsh, while her husband watched her. Then she bent down and stretched out her hands towards the creamy flowers on the fringe of the Lake. One grew a little further out than the others; it lay on its leaves gazing upwards at the sky. She reached for it, overbalanced, then——

“I am slipping, Harry—I am slipping.” The notes of her voice were all discordant and jangled with terror.

He sprang forward and ran towards her . . . as he came he faced right across towards the Jansens’ beach. By the time he had reached her she was struggling in deep water, calling hoarsely for help. Now he had got her—he was holding her at last. The weeds and water-lilies could not claim her with those strong arms around her. But what was he doing? Jane’s screams suddenly stopped, and as she looked she trembled. Why did he not pull her out beside him? She saw—and even as she watched she knew that this was what she had been waiting for for the last few days—that he was holding her there, pushing her down till the water lapped over her head in little waves that gurgled and played. Each time she came up she gazed at him with a sort of desperate entreaty, with the look of one who knows no

hope ; each time he forced her back with those strong hands of his, till her cry was smothered, and at last she ceased to struggle at all.

The mountains looked down impassively, though never before, in all the centuries, could they have beheld so awful a sight . . . the lilies floated like a burial wreath upon the surface . . . the tiny waves lapped the shore like the sound of elfin laughter, the laughter of the women who, ever since the world began, have intrigued and plotted for the love of men.

PART III

CHAPTER I

JANE lay for some weeks in the hospital at Srinagar, in the grip of a sharp attack of malaria. Sometimes she would emerge from the nightmares that held her brain imprisoned, at others she was held down and manacled by an overpowering sense of trouble.

Sometimes she seemed only conscious of a tall line of poplars which she could see from her bedroom window. They reminded her of something—something she could not remember. Try as she would, her brain never seemed able to tell what they stood for. In all its wanderings—and in these days it wandered very far—she never hit upon any solution.

Then hours would pass when she did not care to continue this pursuit. She was alternately chilled by cold and scorched by heat. Her limbs ached dully, her head seemed the playground of every nerve-racking pain, where imps gambolled at pleasure, and beat red-hot, sharply-pointed gimlets into the tender portions of her brain.

After some weeks, when she had regained a little strength, Bob took her back to Sherpore by easy stages. The sight of her own bungalow seemed like an old friend, welcoming her back, and for a few days the contentment of being there again blotted out everything else. It seemed enough just to lie and watch the photo of Guy on the wall, and wonder if he would suddenly step down from the frame and come towards her.

Then a lethargy fell upon her. The coming and going of

the doctor, the vague presence of the ayah, all seemed matters of indifference. It wearied her a little to have to answer questions, to feign an interest, to say "good morning," when Major Jackson's big, good-natured form stood in the door. But when he went, she could slip back again, and lie undisturbed till he came again.

Sometimes she became aware that there was one thing she dreaded. Although nothing seemed to touch her very nearly, she feared that as much as anything. It seemed the only outside occurrence that could penetrate into the circle of her indifference and hurt her as things used to do. She disliked beyond anything the approach of her husband. She felt she could not bear his stinging, bitter words, his mocking laugh. She even shut her eyes once when she heard him coming, pretended to be asleep as he bent over her.

She thought of the poplars vaguely now. She knew she would never fix them in her mind on to any definite thing. They belonged, like everything else, to that misty region which lay behind, which appeared so utterly remote.

One day, when she knew her husband had come into the room and was watching her, she opened her eyes and looked full at him.

"Tired, Jenny—very tired?" he asked gently.

She was conscious of a deep surprise.

He lifted up a pillow that had slipped away, and rearranged it carefully.

But he would come back with his hard eyes and sharp words—she was sure of it. She waited for him with quivering breath and trembling expectation. She was never conscious of his approach without a faint stirring of alarm, a fluttering of the pulses; never heard his voice without listening for the rasping tone in it. He would come—he would come—that husband whom she dreaded, and she would close her eyes and shrink away from the sight and the sound of him.

But he did not come. As the days passed she began to wonder at it, at first hardly daring to confess it to herself.

As they passed, in a monotonous procession, she realised with joy and thankfulness that he would never come again. He had gone, disappeared perhaps into the past, with all those other things that had troubled her, and she need never give them a moment's thought.

But there was still something left at which she could wonder. If the man she had known in Cashmere was henceforth to be a stranger to her, so also was the old, light-hearted, childlike Bob who had vexed her, teased her, held her in so deep an affection. He no longer blundered in and out of her room demanding her attention, fretfully complaining with masculine irritability at any vexation that crossed his path.

A new thoughtfulness had laid hold upon him, a gentleness she had never realised in him before. And behind it all there lay something she could hardly define.

He never whistled now when he went off to the office. Once the tuneless sound had been a mild pleasure to her. He used occasionally to break into song—now he only did it when he thought she was listening. He had something on his mind, and was trying to conceal it. He was attempting to show her what a careless, light-hearted fellow he was, how it was only her illness that prevented him from breaking out into the high spirits that consumed him. Once when she heard him walking about his dressing-room, she moved in bed, and it creaked uneasily under her. She heard him stand still, then begin to hum gaily with a great assumption of joy.

In a few minutes he had put his head in at the door.

“Awake, Jenny?”

“Yes, dear. You are gay this afternoon.”

“Why not? Jackson says you're better.” He crossed the room, and stood looking down upon her.

“Almost fat; and what a colour! Quite the old Jenny again.”

But how pitiful it all was. As if his smile, his laugh, his

whistling could ever deceive her—his wife ! She longed to ask him if he thought that she, his life's companion, could be so deluded by an expression put on, a bar or so hummed out of tune.

Why does he look like that ? a voice within her whispered.

He is anxious about me. He loves me—he has been thinking he might lose me. He has been picturing what his life would be like alone, answered common sense.

Surely you don't believe that story ? It's something deeper than all that. Can't you ask him ? Haven't you a tongue ?

Ask him ? Not she. She would do anything but that. She would play with words, manœuvre them to suit her, move round and round in circles. Ask him ? Never.

And slowly, as she grew stronger, she began to remember what the poplar trees reminded her of, why they stood in a long row like sentinels against the sky. Was it not to whisper and rustle together, and watch things that happen when the mists of evening are beginning to gather, and the water-lilies stare up at the sky with white faces ? She put it from her bravely. Surely she had left all that behind in Srinagar, in the little hospital where she had tossed and turned, and talked incoherently ? Was it a thought to trouble a sane woman who loved the healthy things of life ? No, she knew it belonged to those barren places where her mind had wandered during her illness. She turned her thoughts resolutely to other things.

CHAPTER II

ONE day, as she lay in bed, she heard her husband moving about his room.

She imagined, from his impatient paces to and fro, and muttered exclamations, that he was looking for something, and that it hid itself with a malevolence incredible. Before, he would have burst in upon her, asked irritably where she had put it, then gone out again without waiting for her answer. Then, when it had been found by Abdul in its rightful collar-box or drawer, he would smile upon her with disarming sweetness, assure her that he quite forgave her muddling up his things, did not mind if he never found anything again. Now she heard him mutter impatiently to himself, then give a grunt of satisfaction. Yes—certainly he had changed considerably. He was trying not to make a noise.

“Bob, come here. I want you.”

He came in, and stood looking down upon her.

“Perhaps you would like your tea now?” he said.

“Yes—and could you come and sit with me a little?”

“Of course, my dear,” he answered genially; but behind the warmth of his tone there lay the faintest tinge of uneasiness.

“I feel I should like to talk.”

“Well, so you shall. You never were a bad one at that.”

“... and hear you.”

“It’s years since I’ve heard you say anything that so reminds me of our engagement,” said Mr. Turner, with a sort of forced gaiety. “Going back to the old ways, eh, Jenny?”

The khitmutghar came in and laid the tea, then left the

room noiselessly. The teacups clinked and rattled uneasily under Mr. Turner's clumsy touch. The chicks stirred uneasily, then swung back, and a shaft of light lay across the room like a golden bar.

"Bob."

"Well, my dear?"

"You've talked to me so little since we've been back. No, I don't mean that you haven't been good to me. You've been, well, like your old self, Bob, kind, considerate, the best husband a woman ever had. Just the sort of man the boy I fell in love with was bound to become. Tell me all you've been doing, what people are saying, everything that's happening round us. I want to take an interest in it all again, just as I used to do."

Then Mr. Turner began to tell the story without the plot, in the way we all do when driven into a corner, with a great show of candour and openness, a tremendous pretence of laying bare his very soul.

As she listened a great relief stole over Jane. How could he talk like this if *It* were true? How could he describe the game of polo that he had watched yesterday, his projected tour in the district, the latest engagement, if Daisy . . . No, no, it had been a nightmare while it lasted, but now it was over. The door would open presently, and *she* would come in, with her fair hair fluttering over her forehead in the little tendrils that Jane loved so well, her grey eyes shining, with her slow smile curving her lips. They had kept her away on purpose, she had wanted to come long ago. Major Jackson was always so careful. He was dead against visitors. He kept one quiet, long after there was any necessity for it, with his fussy rules and regulations.

"Bob," she interrupted suddenly. "Don't you think Major Jackson is too careful? His precautions—they're absurd."

Mr. Turner looked surprised.

"Well, no, Jenny, it hadn't struck me. Too careful?"

No, I don't think that's possible. D'ye think you ought to be allowed up?"

"No . . . no. . . . It's visitors. Why can't I have visitors? Can't you suggest it to him? It would sound better coming from you."

"Well, I'll ask him if Emily Taylor can't come round for a bit. She's always worrying to be allowed to see you. 'One of my *oldest* friends—so very strange.' I can hear her now, with her silly, piping tones."

"Emily Taylor? Why Emily Taylor?" A note of disappointment sounded in her voice. "No, on second thoughts I don't think I am strong enough yet. I don't feel as if I could quite manage it. You mustn't force me, Bob. You don't know how weak I feel. Don't press me to have visitors before I am fit for it."

"Just as you like, my dear," he answered good-humouredly. "Now let me finish telling you about Hilyard and the General. I was in the middle of it when you interrupted. Let me see now . . . oh yes, I know. He said rather bluntly . . ."

How they would laugh and chatter together when *she* came! There were the drawing-room cretonnes that had arrived that she must show her, and the chits of the new khansamah that had amused Jane so much. Daisy would laugh softly at the joke about the City Magistrate's wife. She had always found her so entertaining, and this story was the best of the lot. She pictured her doing it now and the tiny dimple showing in her cheek. But she would never, never tell her what she had dreamt about her. She would not even think about it herself after to-day. It should be put away, banished for ever, not to be thought of or dwelt on again. Near the Dhal such things had been possible. Here in Sherpore, with the four walls of the bungalow bedroom looking down upon her, and the strip of compound to be seen through the window, such fancies seemed incredible—childish absurdities. She smiled to herself as

she reflected what a silly woman she had become. How those two elder sisters at home, comfortably settled within calling distance of each other at Cheltenham, would wonder if they knew the horrors that had been allowed access to her mind. It would appear to them quite alien to the traditions of their family, always renowned for its practical common sense.

Now Jane felt that she had become normal again. Was not Bob sitting by her side, and Emily Taylor, to whom nothing ever happened, a mile off at the Club in the verandah with the other mem-sahibs? Somehow the thought of her comforted her strangely. Did not the mantle of her common-placeness enshroud her also in its folds, wrap her away from all the horrible happenings of life? And now she herself could always be like Emily. She would cultivate the likeness. She would tell Daisy about it when she came, and . . . perhaps they might laugh a little together, but there it would be all the same.

" . . . And so that's how it was all settled," ended Mr. Turner. "Of course there were faults on both sides, but I think the General . . . but there . . . we can't go over it all again. . . ."

"That's very interesting—very."

"I knew you'd like to hear it all. It's quite old news by now, and of course there's still a coldness, specially between the wives."

"Well naturally. Who can wonder? Bob, I've changed my mind about seeing Emily Taylor. I *should* like her to come for a little."

She lay back and watched him. She never could see any signs of advancing years in Bob. Other people remarked upon it, especially when they went home, and she had been accustomed to combat it fiercely. Going grey about the temples? Oh, that started when he was a very young man indeed. Overwork, the worries of a father, a hundred reasons. Putting on flesh quickly? Well, no, she couldn't

see it. He had always been that solid build of man. Now she noticed that there *was* a difference, a tiny one, only one that the vigilant eye of a wife would detect at once. A little line of worry had appeared on his forehead where once no line had been, a chronicle of something that had disturbed and distressed him; and, surely, behind the kind blue of his eyes there lay a suggestion of trouble, a slight cloud, as of something which still lingered in his mind, disturbing its happiness.

"I want to see Emily Taylor," she repeated.

"Very well, dear. She shall be told."

"You can send round the syce with a note."

"Quite easily."

Jane watched him steadily. There was something behind his tone of easy acquiescence which caught her attention.

"Are you going to do it, Bob?"

"Do what, Jenny?"

"Send round the syce."

"No—I'm going myself."

"Yourself? Why yourself? Why don't you send him? Why are you so anxious to see her? Are you starting a flirtation that you catch at any chance of seeing her?"

"That's it. Well guessed. Emily Taylor! Don't prevent me, my dear. One must have a fling sometimes. How sharp of you to see through me—I must be more wary another time."

Why did he want to see the woman whom he always described as the spokeswoman of platitudes, the dreariest, most voluble creature that ever vexed the soul of man? And he was not really amused at her suggestion of flirtation, but caught at it eagerly to divert her attention, forced a laugh, shifted in his chair, pulled his moustache, glanced uneasily at the clock.

"It's grand to see you looking yourself again," he said after a while. "To tell you the truth, Jenny, I've been . . . a bit lonely without you. It isn't the same thing coming

back to the bungalow and not finding you ready . . . and jolly . . . and all that sort of thing."

"But now it's going to be like that again. I am going to be ready and jolly, whenever you want me."

"I believe you are. You're round the corner—all the corners. You'll be up and about in no time."

"Just the same as we used to be," repeated Jane happily.

"Just—exactly the same."

The words comforted her wonderfully. The same in everything. The old happy, contented life, running on without any hindrance anywhere.

"You look brighter even than when I came in."

"I believe I shall sleep a little now. You have cheered me up."

"Well, I haven't seen you as fit as this since we've been back."

"Dear Bob, go to the Club and enjoy yourself. Bring me back some news. Mind I want to know everything that's going on."

She smiled at him brightly.

"All right, I'll scrape some together."

"Just give me a handkerchief before you go. They are in the left-hand top drawer. No—not that one. There, now you have it."

Mr. Turner brought one across to his wife.

As she looked at it she gave a little cry of surprise.

"Why, it's not mine. I haven't any with shamrocks on them like this. It's . . . it's . . . why, it's Daisy's, Bob."

"Well, what of that?" he asked calmly.

But she had seen his face. For one instant it had worn the look of alarm, of uneasiness, of disquietude that had come across it when she had suggested a talk. It had passed in a flash, and he had called back his old look of unconcern.

Jane slipped back upon her pillows and watched him out of the room, but she no longer wished to sleep. An

awful nervous restlessness had come over her. It had all come back. Then it was true—true after all.

She was the victim of no delusion. There was something that was being kept from her—and Bob knew—he knew. The dreadful thing was no dream, but a terrible reality.

She saw again the shining water, the clear reflection of the hills, the Cashmeri village some way down the reach, the clustering irises along the shore. She heard the lapping of little waves, the gurgling of the water, the cry of the boatmen far away on the Lake. She saw the floating gardens, the quivering reeds, the water-lilies resting on their leaves. It seemed to her then, as she lay with closed eyes, that never again could she see them without a shudder. There was something so cruelly innocent about them, so suggestive of youth and innocence. And they had watched—as she must always watch, as long as life remained—a scene of horror, which would never grow dim, always remain in the forefront of her mind, cut across her life, dividing it for ever from the happy stretches which lay behind, like a chasm which no time can span.

CHAPTER III

THE next afternoon Mrs. Taylor came to pay her promised visit. She looked alert and bright, and rather important at being the first visitor admitted. A watchful eye united to a retentive brain would have noted old friends among the different articles of her attire. Her hat was trimmed with a piece of last year's evening dress and a fragment taken from an old muff. Her coat showed the hours it had spent beneath the hands of the dirzie on the back verandah, as it became transformed into this season's fashion. Everything was welded together into a not unattractive whole, and as she came across the room towards Jane's bed, the latter felt obliged to admit to herself that in happy circumstances Emily was not at all a bad-looking woman.

"How are you?" she asked in her usual highly-pitched, staccato tones. "Not nearly as bad as I expected to find you. What a time you've had with these attacks! That's the worst of fever—it never knows when to stop. I expect you stayed down in the low ground too long."

"That must have been it," Jane admitted wearily. "We ought to have left the valley and gone up to Gulmurg directly it became hot. We stayed down too long . . . much too long."

"Well, now we have you back we'll get you well in no time. Your husband and I were talking about it only yesterday. 'You must help me, Mrs. Taylor, all women understand these things. Come and cheer Jane up with some of your gossip,' he said to me. 'She wants to hear about the young people of the station, and about your new clothes, and . . . and all that sort of thing.' So of course I came off as soon as I could."

She shook up Mrs. Turner's pillows in an automatic sort of way. Invalids always wanted their pillows shaken up. It was quite the thing to do.

"Sherpore isn't itself with you lying ill, Jane. No one likes to sit in your chair in the corner in the Club where you always sat. I've never missed anyone half as much before. You always were the first to come down from the Hills, and the last to go away."

"It seems so long ago since I used to go there and talk. How remote it all seems now! Nothing was too trivial for us to discuss and wonder about! There was no budding flirtation or love-affair that ever escaped our notice," said Jane languidly. She lay back, determined if possible to escape a fresh onslaught on her pillows.

"And it's all going on still," went on Mrs. Taylor cheerfully. "We are just as interested as ever in Colonel Walters and the Walsham girl. I was only saying to-day that if it does come off, it is the strangest affair I've ever come across."

"Strange . . . very strange," murmured Jane. It did strike her as queer that there ever had been a time when this sort of thing interested her.

"You may well call it so, with so many better-looking women about. But can one ever put one's finger on just the thing that *does* attract a man? I am sure I find it impossible. I confess to being amazed. When he might have been taken up by such different women. I told him to come in *whenever* he liked, to drop in just like one of the family, and take us as we are. . . . But, no, it appears he prefers a woman . . ."

Jane interrupted suddenly.

"Isn't fever a strange thing, Emily?"

"Very strange."

"Have you ever had it badly?"

"I was once ninety-nine for four days," said Mrs. Taylor solemnly.

Jane smiled wanly.

"Poor dear, but we have kept you with us in spite of it. Your constitution pulled you through. But I meant more in its effect upon the mind."

"I have never noticed it."

"Didn't you have strange dreams, nightmares, all that sort of thing when you had a temperature?" asked Jane anxiously. "Ideas you couldn't shake off . . . queer thoughts which seem to grip your mind . . . which even in your sleep you feel subconsciously; there when you wake, waiting by your bedside, never leaving you all day, but unreal . . . quite unreal. Oh do say you remember."

"No I can't say I do," said Mrs. Taylor with some regret.

"I forgot. You are not the woman to whom things happen—even unpleasant ones. No, Emily, I am not laughing. Perhaps with a temperature of ninety-nine you wouldn't suffer from them. But I've been high—very high. It's natural, isn't it?"

"I don't know. Can't say I'm sure," Mrs. Taylor answered. Then she suddenly remembered she was there to cheer the patient. "Young Dacre is down with fever," she announced suddenly. "He was quite bad a few days ago, and Marcia Holiday goes about looking so wretched. Very pointed, I call it. They say her engagement may be broken off at any moment, but I doubt if Philip Dacre would come forward."

"Really?" Jane did not appear to take any interest in Miss Holiday's love-affairs, but returned to the subject of dreams.

"Of course it is natural for a woman like myself to have nightmares when I am ill. I am more excitable than you, Emily. You don't think it strange that I should have fancies, do you?"

Mrs. Taylor eyed her with some suspicion.

"You mustn't brood, Jane. It's bad—and tiresome for your husband. It must annoy him very much I should say. Can't you read some amusing books? I will choose you

some at the Club, and send them round this evening. You ought to rouse yourself, and not give way to this morbidness."

Jane lay back upon her pillows, and closed her eyes. Emily, voicing the unending platitude, the ayah's distant shuffle, the gentle swaying of the chicks filled her with weary impatience. She longed at that moment to strike some responsive spark from her friend, hear her eager reassurances that all she had suffered was a dream—a hideous dream—that she need only regain health and tone to shake it off altogether. She would have given a great deal then to have read Emily's thoughts, known what really lay under those carefully-modulated tones, looked behind those bright blue eyes into the slowly-moving brain. But above all she wanted to hear that she, too, had wrestled with nightmares, striven with bad dreams, struggled through a time of darkness. If Emily had felt the same, surely she—Jane Turner—need have no fear?

"Have you been to the Club lately?" she asked after a pause.

"I have just left it."

"Did you talk to anyone?"

"Yes, yes, of course. I am not the sort of woman to mope alone—not that anyone allows me to do so. I had a chat with Captain Gatacre—he would not let me go. We met just inside the library, and stood a long time talking. I saw him go in there, and thought it would be a good opportunity to get my book."

"Was he the only one you talked to?"

"Why do you ask? Is there anything you want to know, Jane? If so why can't you ask it straight out? And I can't believe it can be good for you to be so restless. Why don't you lie still a little?"

"Is there anything strange in my wanting to know what everyone is doing?" asked Jane irritably. "I must say I think you have a very queer way with invalids. Why shouldn't I ask?"

"No reason at all."

"Did you see the Jansens?"

"No, dear. How could I?" said Mrs. Taylor with irritating obscurity.

"Why not? Does she never go out? Why shouldn't you see her?"

"Because she's gone home—at least I suppose so. Yes—I am sure I was told she'd gone home."

"Gone home?" echoed Jane blankly. "How very strange—how very strange. To go now...."

"It's a pity he hasn't gone with her. He looks as if he wants a change if ever a man did," went on Mrs. Taylor.

"How does he look?"

"Do lie down. Let me shake up your pillows for you. No? Well, just as you like, only I thought it would make you more comfortable."

"Emily, tell me how Colonel Jansen looks."

Mrs. Taylor spoke unwillingly, even sulkily:

"Entirely altered. There! you have forced me to say it. Mr. Turner would scold me if he knew I'd told you."

"Has he been ill?"

"I don't think so. How hoarse your voice sounds! Are you sure you're all right? Shall I call the ayah?"

"No, no. Go on. I am interested. I always speak like that when I'm excited."

"He looks . . . oh, I can't explain. As if he had seen something dreadful . . . some experience he couldn't get over . . . or forget . . . almost as if . . ." She broke off suddenly and looked at Jane guiltily. "Now I *insist* upon your lying back on your pillows. I can't believe all this talking can be good for you. What would your husband say to me if he saw you now? I shall leave you to rest a little, and tell the ayah to bring in your tea. Now good-bye, dear. I am glad if I've cheered you up at all."

When she had gone, and the sounds of the trap driving off had died away in the distance, Jane closed her eyes.

Was she never to be free again? Why did Colonel Jansen look like that? Was he like her, one of those who never forget? But what . . .? Her brain began to work remorselessly, lifting up each one of Emily's words, turning it this way and that. She had surprised the words out of her, worried her till she had said them. And how guilty she had looked! Was that what Bob had been afraid of? Was that why he had gone to see her, to warn her that there were some subjects that had better not be mentioned between them?

In the midst of her thoughts Jane's eyes suddenly fell upon Bob's hunting-crop, which lay upon her table. It was a little thing, but it made her thoughts swirl round. It typified for her all that was sane and healthy. It linked her to the outside world. Her hungering mind seized it, as a shipwrecked mariner might his spar, tenaciously, hopefully. She felt instinctively that it did not belong to the same plane of thought as fantastic images, terrifying things. She turned from them with a weary longing to enter again the world of ordinary things, push open the door which led to them, and dwell once more in security and repose. She felt a sudden sick distaste of the dark places where her mind had been wandering. Somehow that riding-whip of Bob's suggested health to her and passing through the fresh air quickly, feeling the mounting blood, tasting the crisp air. Her thoughts played round it happily, with a sudden strong revolt from everything abnormal.

So she gently glided into a happier frame of mind.

CHAPTER IV

THE next morning Jane's happy mood continued. She awoke after a refreshing night, and had to confess that she had had no nightmares. Bob's solicitude cheered and warmed her. She felt every time she heard his kindly tones and looked into his eyes that she had drifted into a safe harbour, that, though something indeed lay behind her on which she did not care to dwell, a better future lay before her. She heard him go off to the lines in his old cheery way, and—yes, she was sure she heard him whistling as he went down the drive.

During the morning Emily Taylor again looked in, and unconsciously in a more amusing mood. She had had a passage of arms with the mother of the girl whose engagement might be broken off, and was pathetically anxious to repeat her own remarks on the subject. Then there was everything her husband had said when the encounter had been related to him, and one or two things that had occurred to her since, ending with an entire résumé of the whole affair which did not err on the side of brevity.

Before she had finished Jane had laughed heartily once or twice, and decided that she would not exchange Emily for anyone the world could offer.

Later in the morning Major Jackson had called and found time to chat a little. It seemed a great deal had happened in the station. Some new bungalows had been put up on the circular road, the Club had been enlarged, the polo tournament was to be held in Sherpore this year. The cold weather was opening gaily, a few miss-sahibs had arrived from home. It was not too sanguine to expect an engagement before long.

“Have visitors, Mrs. Turner. Now is the time to get your old friends to see you. Employ yourself a little. Don't mope. Think of the trip home next year. Didn't know you were going? Well, that's something to harry your husband about. You ought to be going if you're not.”

When he had gone Jane lay back and watched the crows hopping on to the verandah outside, then flying away with startled caws. Across the parade ground someone was trying over bugle calls with a sort of obstinate persistence. An occasional tum-tum rattled by. One turned in at the gate, evidently some one inquiring for her, then jingled away again into the Mall. Life was going on all round her. She heard the chatter from the servants' quarters, the tinkle of the ayah's bangles as she squatted on the verandah, the footsteps of the bearer's children as they pattered through the dust. She saw the last photo of Guy that Bob had hung up on the wall opposite her bed. How young and full of life he looked! He might almost have stood for a study of vitality.

In a few days she must take it all up again. Major Jackson had said as much. She must go to dinner parties, arrange them herself, order the gharry, drive to the Club, take an interest again in the bazaar prices, the new trapper, the box from home. She must invite the young policemen to her house, see that they were not engaging themselves to undesirable girls, in fact justify her existence as the wife of a senior policeman. Life was holding out its hands to her, trying to draw her again into its circle. She could not lie here for ever watching the sunshine in the compound and the dark foliage of the shisham trees against the blue of the sky. Soon patches of snow would be seen on the summits of the hills, then they would fade away and spring would appear gently like a welcome guest crossing a threshold, then the hot weather would come suddenly, before they quite realised its approach. She must take

part in it all again, make something out of each day as it came.

Somehow this morning the prospect did not appal her. For the first time for months she felt tethered again to the normal. The remembrance of the Dhal seemed fantastic, unreal, a mist that is blown away by a mountain breeze. Could anything out of the way happen to a friend of Emily Taylor's? Did not the mantle of her unadventurous life enwrap her and protect her? She was steadied, calmed. Life seemed a healthier thing than she had thought it. She felt once more a desire to be up and doing, joining in the work around her, fulfilling her duty as a mem-sahib.

She raised herself in bed on her arm and called to the ayah :

"Buria, bring me my book. I want to read it. I have lain here too long doing nothing. Yes, yes, the doctor sahib wills it. I haven't touched it since . . . oh, for a long, long time. And it promised to be good . . . very good. Yes, lay it here by me."

Buria brought it and laid it by her, then slipped away to gossip with the other servants. The door swung to behind her, and Jane took up the first page of her manuscript.

She had always written with facility, an ease and charm that delighted her readers. She looked at things and wrote of them with a certain purity and sincerity of outlook. Her mind was wholesome, and her stories reflected it faithfully. The story opened prettily, she could not but admit it to herself. The word did not offend her in the way it would have done more ambitious authoresses—in fact she rather liked it as applied to her writing. She loved her blue-eyed girls and brave young men. It amused her to recount their stupidities, blunders, adventures, and final, never-failing successes. Page 402 was always a happy one—she had never intended it to be otherwise.

After reading for a little a faint feeling of uneasiness crept over her. She felt rather like an intruder, who strays into what he believes to be his own home, only to find strange rooms and unfamiliar faces. Was this really Alicia? She took up the pages again, and read on with shaking hands.

The ayah brought in her tiffin-tray, and laid it down beside her. She hastily ate a little, then, pushing it away, took up the sheets again.

Could this really be her work? She almost doubted it. The writing was hers, she knew only too well the loops and slurs. No one else ever dotted their i's or crossed their t's just in the same way. But the characters were not consistent with their gentle promising beginning. The book seemed to her to breathe an atmosphere of pleasure pursued at all costs, of subtle cruelty, of callous unconcern. If it had been placed by the side of one of her former ones, no one would have guessed that it came from the same pen. Could anyone who had ever written a "pretty" story be capable of such suggestion, such a cold picture of human nature?

She read on and on. The pages fluttered down beside her, and lay on the counterpane like fallen leaves. The ayah crept in and squatted down near the fireplace, watching the mem-sahib with bright, bead-like eyes.

"But this is horrible—horrible," Jane murmured as she read. "Ayah, this can't be me—it can't indeed. I can't have written things like these."

Burra smiled meaninglessly. She could not understand the mem-sahib, but she could always smile.

"This would keep people awake at night, and give them dreams—bad ones," went on Jane unsteadily. "And that was what they used to say my books would never do. I remember one reviewer saying that I should never rob anyone of an hour's sleep. Ayah, ayah, say this isn't me."

Buria smiled again, but this time with even less meaning and more glinting of black eyes and white teeth; but she watched her mistress with interest as she fumbled among the pages.

Suddenly Jane raised herself on her elbow. She understood—she understood at last.

It was the Dhal again. She had not really been untouched, passed over. She had weaved the atmosphere into every line she had written. It had poisoned her work, running like a thread through it.

So the joy with which she had worked, the ease with which she had written had all come from the influence under which she had lain. All those hours spent under the trees had been dedicated to it. It was as if her pen had been driven forward by an unseen hand.

“I can’t bear to be in the same room with it,” she cried suddenly. “Ayah, burn it. Yes, take it. Put it into the fire at once, at once. I can’t rest till it is finished, wiped utterly away.”

When the last flame had smouldered down, and a heap of ashes showed where once the book had been, Jane sat up again.

“Send for the sahib,” she said quietly.

Buria explained that he was at the Club.

“Never mind—send for him.”

She went off shaking her head. She had seen the end of marriages when wives send for their husbands while they are enjoying a peg, and her disposition was not optimistic. It seemed to her a reckless thing that Turner mem-sahib was doing, but she went and gave the message, and came back and sat outside the room with brooding eyes.

“Bob, I must know.”

“I knew it would come to this, but I kept it from you as long as I could.”

"I must hear it now—everything. Tell me everything, Bob. Don't try and break it."

"Very well, just as you wish. My poor Jenny, my poor girl. It's better you should know. You must some time—but it'll be a terrible shock to you."

"Never mind."

"The day you became ill, Daisy was drowned in the Lake. She was picking water-lilies, leant out too far, slipped in, and by the time Harry got to her it was too late—they had sucked her down. I loathe the sight of the horrible things, with their innocent white faces. I can't bear even to look at them. It was before his eyes . . . literally before his eyes . . . but he couldn't get there in time, he did what he could."

"Go on."

"After her death he never expressed any sorrow, or alluded to it in any way. A sort of numbness seemed to have seized him. His life went on exactly as if he didn't realise that she wasn't there, as if her death was a triviality, infinitely remote from himself. Shock works queerly on most people, but I've never seen anyone take it like that. I don't seem able to understand . . . anything," he added miserably.

In the depth of her dazed mind Jane was conscious of one conclusion. It seemed to penetrate through the numbness and bewilderment like the faint, clear light of dawn stealing over a darkened sky. They had resumed their normal relations; she the comforter, he the hurt child, suffering from the buffets of the world, coming to her for help and pity, and her heart went out to him more than ever before, in protective love. In that moment she knew—and it stirred the very depths of tenderness in her—that he would always be the one who leans, she the strong support. He would ever look to her for the strength he needed, as it would ever be her joy to give it; and she knew that it would be this, and this alone, that would draw her back to

health and happiness, smooth away the dreadful things of life, show it to her in all its loveliness again. Guy would mature, have children of his own. What would it matter? As long as Bob lived she would have someone with her who would never become older or self-reliant. He would never cease to need her comfort and help. He was of the kind that never grows up.

After a little Mr. Turner began again.

"He refused to see people, or to take any steps to leave. All day he would sit on that little beach by himself, and never even speak to the khitmutghar who brought him his meals. At night he would prowl up and down on the shore, or go out upon the Lake and row about till morning. The servants left him, one by one, in sheer horror of the place, all but his old bearer who's been with him ever since he's been in India. I suppose he could not bear to tear himself away, though how he could endure the sight of those awful water-lilies is more than I can say. Then when you were a little better we left Srinagar and came down here . . . and since then I've heard nothing. He may be there still for all I know."

Jane shuddered slightly.

"I don't care where he is," she said dully. "What does it matter? Oh! what does it matter now?"

She looked at her husband, noticing his tired, lined face, his saddened expression, his whole air of despondency and care. It hurt her to contrast him with what he had been a few months ago, but something also comforted her. He was the man who leant upon her, depended on her. He loved her with the old steadfastness, and her heart stirred with tenderness towards him. He was restored to her. Beyond that she could not look.

"Dear Bob, we have each other, and we are—as we used to be."

"Yes, Jenny. And it's everything to me now. It's all the world to me that we're together."

“And happy?” she asked.

“Yes, happy in being together,” he assented gravely.

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The next day Jane got up. All the morning she went about the bungalow, now into this room, now into that, rearranging, straightening, adjusting.

On the back verandah she caught sight of the little table that used to stand by the drawing-room door. Now it lay on its side. Its one sound leg had snapped; the strain thrown on it by the two rickety ones had been too severe.

She called to the bearer.

“How did this happen? How came such a beautiful thing to be spoilt? Was it chance . . . or an accident?” she asked tremulously.

Abdul looked at it gravely.

“Oh, Oakes Sahib leant on it—and it broke. As it was no use any more I put it here till you should tell me what to do about it. It snapped. . . .”

She waved him away impatiently.

No use any more—yes—that was it. The collapse was final and complete, the delicate thing was broken and destroyed, fit only for a lumber shed or back verandah. It could not bear the strain. So Life plays its sorry jest. . . .

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“Jenny, would you like to see Jansen? He’s here, come to say good-bye to you. He’s starting to-day.”

“Starting? Where for?”

“He’ll tell you. Shall I ask him to come in?”

“Yes, yes. I long to see him.”

He had changed—Emily Taylor was right. If her eyes could detect the difference, was it not doubly apparent to Jane, whose faculties were sharpened by affection and sympathy? As he came in at the door and crossed the room

towards her, she watched him anxiously, eagerly. He appeared to her aged and changed in some subtle, indefinable way that defied description.

"You are off on a journey?" she asked tremulously.

"Bob told me you are starting to-day."

"Yes—I have come in to see you before I leave." He stood looking down upon her with his usual kindness.

"Where are you going, Colonel Jansen? Tell me that. Where are you going?"

It seemed to Jane that the only sound in the room was the fluttering of her own heart, and its hammer-like strokes against her side. Bob had gone to the window, and stood looking out into the bright sunshine of the compound.

"I am going to Cashmere—to the Dhal. I see now I must return."

"Why are you going there again?"

He answered steadily.

"To bring *her* back."

"Then she's there—with him?"

He nodded.

"By the Dhal . . . still in the camp beneath the chenars," she repeated mechanically. "And we are here again . . . but we can't forget. No, never, as long as we live. But she's there . . . still."

A strange silence fell upon them. A vivid recollection of their last meeting, their words, their surroundings fell upon Jane. How the water had glittered that day they had talked together, how noisily the little runnel had trickled on its way to join the Lake! She seemed to see the pariah dog creeping nearer, then bounding away to its home among the huts, the string of Cashmeri women, the bending willow trees. If she were to shut her eyes she knew she could have heard the wind in the mulberry trees, the lapping of the water, the cries from the village.

After a little she spoke again.

“ You are going to make an appeal ? ”

“ No.”

She faced him again eagerly, anxiously.

“ Then why are you going ? ”

“ To struggle. To fight for her. To bring her back at all costs.”

She felt a great relief. In all this sea of change, he seemed to her firm, stable, unshaken. She knew she could put unlimited faith in those kindly eyes, that grave face. It appeared to her suddenly that nothing else was possible to him ; his course lay before him straight and plain. He was returning to struggle against the evil. He was not the man to relinquish the fight, or shelve his responsibilities. Surely that was all that mattered ?

She looked at him with a strange, indefinable feeling of thankfulness and comfort. He stood, as ever, for all that was right. If he had failed now it would have meant much to her. She would have felt his alteration terribly. It would have wrenched away the supports on which she was beginning to lean. It would have dealt her faith a shattering blow.

But he was not changed. He stood firm—and he was starting for Cashmere.

Mr. Turner came from the window and stood beside her. His large presence seemed comforting and supporting. He frowned a little, as at overwhelming perplexities.

“ Then Jenny and I shall not see you again—just yet ? ”

“ Not just yet. But when I return.”

“ And that, we’ll hope, will be very soon.”

“ Yes, when you return,” said Jane. “ And you start ? ”

“ To-night.”

Together the Turners watched him out of sight. . . .

